THE CIVIL SERVICE AND THE PEOPLE

R. W. Rawlings

LAWRENCE AND WISHART
LONDON

First published 1945

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
BY WESTERN PRINTING SERVICES LTD., BRISTOL

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

If I had set out in this book merely to present a factual study of the British Civil Service, it would have been unnecessary to go to the trouble of writing it; for that task has already been admirably performed by a number of eminently qualified writers. Its structure, its methods and the history of its development as an institution have all been exhaustively treated in a number of well written and well documented books. It would have been folly, therefore, to repeat what has been done so much better by others. But in all these books I have failed to discover any real recognition of something which from the very beginning seemed crystal clear to the present writer. That something was the fact that the Civil Service, far from being a cloistered institution far above the battle, with its own code, creed and traditions, was in the light of detailed examination nothing much more than the administrative arm of a state which had itself passed through a number of phases.

This is not necessarily a criticism of other writers on the service, most of whom have had no practical experience from the inside of the way in which the wheels of the state apparatus revolve.

It is, I think, a fair assumption that only a serving civil servant can be in a position to observe the modifications of that apparatus which have taken place because of the impact of economic and social changes. What I have set out to do, therefore, is to present a picture of the Civil Service, not as a solid British institution standing immovable and unchanging through all the changing pattern of history, but as a developing organism reflecting, in its structure, its conditions of service and its technique, the general flux and development which in succeeding phases has characterized the economic arrangements of our country.

There has been no deliberate attempt on my part to confirm this or that view of the state as a whole. The facts have been set down as I myself have seen them. Of some, I have had

actual first-hand experience. All of them are capable of verification and to me they seem to lead to one inescapable conclusion that, on all the evidence so far available, the Civil Service as a whole has been unable to get very far away from the aims and purposes of the small minority which from time to time has controlled the destinies of our country. The changes which have taken place within it, and some of them have been drastic, have nevertheless been in the main only those adaptations which an evolving capitalism has demanded. When, for instance, nepotism and patronage gave way to open competition and a cleaner Civil Service, it represented a change forced upon the possessing class of the day by the requirements of an expanding industry and economy.

Nepotism inside the state apparatus was bad for capitalism —nepotism must go. At a much later stage, a measure of scientific research conducted under direct state auspices was found to be good for capitalism. Science arrived, therefore, on the Service scene, with results which I have tried to show in a chapter devoted to the subject. Today there is no more urgent question for British politics than the measure and quality of the control to be exercised over the operations of capitalism after the war, and, according to the way in which that question is answered, so again will the Civil Service be modified in its structure to meet the needs of the productive system. If that system remains predominantly capitalistic then to me it is clear that all its glaringly obvious defects will continue to find a place within the service. That inference can be drawn, not only from an investigation into the actual functions of the Civil Service but also from an examination of the conditions in which that function is performed. Whether we look at the role of the administrative civil servant, the position of the technical and professional classes or the work of the principal departments of state, we seem to arrive at a similar result. It can even be said that the excessive cautiousness which is said to characterize the average civil servant (whoever he may be), the lack of initiative and vision which is supposed again to hall-mark the administration, and the circumlocution which by popular belief leads to a slowing up

of every departmental process are the inevitable accompaniments of a state service which cannot, if it would, disentangle itself from a productive system based on private profit.

Throughout the Service, thousands of public employees of every grade and class are beginning to see this—beginning to appreciate that the very qualities, the alleged lack of which the critics so much deplore, are stultified and often unrecognized in a Civil Service which does not, by its nature, truly serve the whole of the people. They do what they can to face up to their responsibilities, and throughout the war years particularly there has been a high record of devotion in department after department towards the general public which looks to them for guidance through the maze of wartime regulations and orders. In employment exchanges, public assistance centres, income tax offices and local food offices up and down the country, rank-and-file civil servants have been coming into closer contact with the public than ever before. The isolationist position of the state employee has become untenable and ancient prejudices, often deliberately inculcated, have been broken down. It will be impossible, I suggest, for anyone, for political or other reasons, to prevent that contact from becoming even more intimate, for civil servants themselves are sufferers from the system. The growing knowledge that they are in the long run nothing but the instruments of an elaborately disguised class domination, combined with the attempt on the part of heads of state to foster the idea that they are a class apart from those classes who more directly work for the capitalist system, is making the Civil Service a breeding ground for neurosis and every kind of frustration. Add to this the incontrovertible fact that hundreds of thousands of civil servants are, in normal circumstances, not very far away from the poverty line and we need look no further to explain the discontents with which the Service is rife.

There is another form of impoverishment too from which the rank-and-file civil servant suffers. Mentally, politically, one might also say in a special sense spiritually, every attempt has been made to stunt his growth towards adult consciousness. Cut off by the Trades Disputes Act from contact with

the organized trade union movement, forbidden to take active part in controversial issues, told to regard himself as set apart for a function which presumably needs no knowledge of the outside world, is it any wonder that for many civil servants, the overcoming of a deliberately induced inertia has been a well-nigh superhuman task? Nevertheless, there is a leaven working within the state apparatus. There is a general recognition that the peoples everywhere are on the march and there is no desire on the part of large sections of the Civil Service to be out of step. Plans for a better Britain, they appreciate, rest not only on the defeat of the vested interests which will make every attempt to thwart them, but on the administrative ability and organizational enthusiasm with which they are handled by the appropriate departments. That in its turn can only be ensured by having a politically and socially conscious Civil Service anxious to play its part in post-war reconstruction, and willing to adapt its own structure for the purpose. In the final chapters of this book I have attempted to describe the nature of those adaptations and the probable social changes to which they must be related.

In one respect I feel bound to anticipate, and if possible disarm, criticism. The book is written with a quite definite bias. I am a socialist with convictions which a quarter of a century in the service of the state and an equal number of years in the Service trade union movement have served only to deepen. I am convinced therefore that only a socialist state can evolve a Civil Service freed from its present disabilities and defects, and equipped with the outlook and initiative necessary to tackle the constructive tasks which lie ahead. That lesson is being driven home to the civil servant in the light of his day-to-day experience. It is my fervent hope that this book will assist in the process.

R. W. R.

CHAPTER I

WHAT *IS* THE CIVIL SERVICE?

In order to get to know something about this great and growing entity, described all too loosely as the Civil Service, we shall do well to proceed at once to precise definition. The *Encyclopædia Britannica* can help us here and this is what it says:

> The Civil Service is the name given to the aggregate of all the Public Servants or paid Civil Administrators and clerks of a State—the machinery by which the Executive through the various administrations carry on the central government of the country.

It will be observed that this definition omits from its scope all the armed forces of the crown, which since the close of the eighteenth century have been distinguished from all those other classes of state and public employees connected with administration and the carrying out of policy. The exclusion, however, of the local government official, the policeman and the teacher, is not quite so obvious except by reference to the words "central government" in the definition; but we can take it that although each of these classes is employed in a public capacity and paid from the public purse, they are not civil servants "within the meaning of the Act".

It will be necessary, later, to discuss the reference in the definition to "the state"; for to this ambiguous term most of the rest is related. In seeking to define the function of the Civil Service and to trace its development through successive eras of social change, we may find a valuable clue in the nature and function of the state, of which it is both the instrument and the expression. We will return to this again.

We have described the Service as a "great and growing" entity—the term is no exaggeration.

Only one hundred and fifty years ago there were 16,267

operations. There are roughly 2½ per cent of them; and a shorthand and typing staff accounting for another 3 per cent. Porters and messengers furnish 6 per cent of the total, and technical, professional and inspectorial grades—of whom a lot more must be said—a further 6 per cent. We are left then only with the minor and manipulative grades, employed mainly in the postal services, and adding up to approximately 55 per cent of the service personnel.

I have excluded from these percentages the industrial civil servants, not because they are unimportant, far from it, but because their general conditions are governed to a large extent by the position with regard to similar categories employed in outside industry. In 1938, as I have said, there were more than 200,000 of them and their numbers have increased proportionately with the rest of the Service.

And *where* are all these people employed? There was a time when the term civil servant was equated with Whitehall. The whole of the state apparatus was popularly supposed to cluster and swarm within an area of a square mile or so. This, together with a number of other strongly held beliefs about the Civil Service, is a fallacy.

The social and economic developments of the last quarter of a century have gradually shifted the emphasis, until today most of the work of the state is performed in outstations geographically remote from London, S.W.1. The Revenue Department for instance radiates from Somerset House in every direction, and its work is done in over 1,200 district and collection offices. The exchange staff of the Ministry of Labour is just as widely scattered, and to take a more recent example, the Ministry of Food finds a home in almost every town, village and borough in the United Kingdom. In short, the wartime proliferation of departments in every direction, combined with evacuation to safe areas, has only served to hasten a development which was already far advanced. As a result, Whitehall is probably no longer the hub of the Civil Service universe. The Service has been forced, in fact, to follow the general trend of industrial development and to pitch its tent wherever the modifications of monopoly

capitalism created a need for some form or another of state activity. It is also a factor, which in itself has made for big administrative difficulties, inseparable from the general problem of growth. Further to illustrate this point it is necessary to take only a short period of twenty years at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1899, the extension of elementary education saw the rise of the Board of Education. Prior to this there were the beginnings of an Education Department set up by an Order in Council in 1856 and followed in 1870 by the appointment of a paid head responsible to Parliament. These social changes brought about by a combination of public pressure and the need for a better educated proletariat created the equal need for a Civil Service within the educational field, to administer and organize the new development. The teachers, although remunerated in accordance with scales determined by national agreements, are not by definition, as we have seen, civil servants; but the distinction is largely academic and will tend to become more so. In 1908, again under public pressure, old age pensions were introduced and this was followed in 1909 and 1911 by the National Health and Unemployment Insurance Acts. In 1917 the Ministry of Labour was created, and in 1919 the Ministry of Health. This is not the place to argue the why and wherefore of social service legislation beyond the plain assertion that much of the expansion of the Civil Service during this short span arose directly out of a measure of social service which not even a strong individualist like Sir Ernest Benn would dare to suggest should be withdrawn.

Another point which should be made clear is that where some form of social service was conceded in response to organized social pressure, it was usually administered in such a way as to defeat the larger interests, to serve which the public pressure had been applied. To put it another way. The public knew what it wanted whether its demand was for better working conditions, more education or an improved drainage system, but by the time the administration got to work upon them, it was the form rather than the substance which emerged. A generalized demand for education resulted, for instance,

in the compulsory acquisition of the three R's to serve, not the interests of the people as a whole, but the very much narrower interests of a rising capitalistic class.

Later we shall argue that as with the social services conceded by capitalism, so it has been with those departments of state more directly concerned with the central government of the country. The Civil Service has, up to the present and through all the phases of its development, reflected very faithfully the needs of the class of which it has always been the instrument. But more of that in due season.

CHAPTER 2

PAY AND PENSION

WE shall go on now to discuss for a while the general conditions under which civil servants are employed, the principles upon which they are remunerated and the sources from which they are recruited. In circles where prejudice, ignorance, or more commonly a disguised vested interest are the ruling motives, the civil servant is criticised because of his preference for security of tenure rather than the precarious hazards and occasional glittering prizes associated with employment in the industrial and business world. To the extent that this is true, it provides an illuminating commentary on the system which produces, side by side, two such different sets of conditions of employment and rewards for two sections of the workers, between whom no artificial distinctions should need to be made. Ramsay Muir in his book *How Britain is Governed* said, in reply to this type of critic, "they would like to substitute a method of pay and promotion which would stimulate ambition and create a *healthy* [my italics] insecurity of tenure—they would substitute the principle of 'get on or get out' which they hold to be essential if energy, enterprise and initiative are to be encouraged . . . but the business of Government officials is to administer the Law and they must therefore be above temptation of being influenced either by fear or the prospect of personal advantage. Whereas the fear of loss and the prospect of gain are the governing motives of business life." Precisely, and it is only necessary to add a footnote to the effect that in one country where the "state stooge" is the rule rather than the exception, the achievement of security against unemployment and poverty has at the same time been accompanied by an energy, enterprise and initiative which has startled the world. We shall see, however (pp. 126-8) that this could only happen because of a complete transformation of the function of the state and the role of the state

employee. As to the much vaunted security of the civil servant, even that would need to be qualified in the case of the hundreds of thousands of "temporaries", the post-war position of whom is already giving grave concern to the Civil Service unions who have charge of their interests. So far as the established civil servant is concerned, we should do well to remember that it was only ten short years ago that it could have been said with entire accuracy that of 300,000 state employees, 35,000 were receiving less than £2 per week; 183,000 less than £4 per week, and 219,000 (over 70 per cent) less than £5 per week. The comparative poverty represented by these figures was supposed to be mitigated by the fact that it was at least "permanent" and therefore presumably more bearable. Actually, in 1933, a campaign for a general all-round improvement in Service remuneration included a claim for a minimum wage of £3 10s. 0d. a week. This claim, modest though its dimensions, was coldly received by a Royal Commission which argued that "its acceptance would result in payment of remuneration considerably in excess of that received by persons in comparable outside employment"—an argument which seemed to suggest that the healthy initiative and enterprise which, according to the critics of the Service, was supposed to rule outside, didn't seem to be getting its practitioners very far.

Another commentary on the wages system, as applied by monopoly capitalism, was furnished by the Tomlin Commission on the Civil Service, which, in seeking to lay down general principles for Service remuneration, rejected the theory of the state as a model employer, "as one which afforded no practical guidance in fixing wages or the responsibility of the state towards its employees" yet went on to contend with unintentional naïveté that "in public employment the test of profit or loss cannot normally be employed".

It is clear from this that the state as an employer has never sought to contract out of the capitalist system, and that in fixing its wage and salary scales it has been guided by the same law of supply and demand, by reference to which wages in industry have invariably been determined. This strict determination

not to get out of step with the private employer of labour was underlined time and again during the sittings of the Tomlin Commission, which from 1929 to 1931 sat in judgment on the Civil Service.

The Service unions, in their evidence, had insisted that in matters of wages and conditions the state should be like Caesar's wife and had urged that "the theory of the state as model employer was incompatible with the practice of relating Service rates to outside industry, particularly since the employment of civil servants was on a highly selective basis". The Treasury spokesmen, however, thought otherwise. Service rates, they contended, "should *not* be out of scale with those outside, but should be such as to ensure an efficient and healthy public service. If they were to exceed outside rates it would have the effect of elevating the Civil Service to a privileged class and so do an injustice to the community which would have to foot the bill." Six years before this, in 1923, a committee, presided over by Sir John Anderson, now the political head of the Civil Service, enunciated the principle that "the state should pay what is necessary to recruit and retain an efficient staff" and the line-up with the industrial employer was given additional emphasis by an official pronouncement during the hearing of an arbitration case in 1927, to the effect that "the broad principle should be the maintenance of fair *relativity* [my italics] between the wages of the civil servant and those obtaining in outside industry". To this general principle the Tomlin Commission itself gave assent, when, stripped of verbiage, it produced the formula which governs to this day the determination of wage and salary scales for the Civil Service. Reduced to a sentence, it recommended to the government that "Civil Service rates of pay should reflect the long-term trend in wage levels and the economic condition of the country".

Now today no one with the most rudimentary acquaintance with economics supposes that the economic condition of the country can be determined in existing circumstances except by those who control its productive processes. All that this formula amounts to therefore is an assertion that whatever

fluctuations in outside wage standards are brought about by the alternate boom and slump of uncontrolled capitalism will, in the long run, be faithfully reflected in the standards adopted by the state itself in its treatment of its own employees. Moreover, although as we shall see later the civil servant is required "to accept a code of conduct and conditions of employment which together constitute a vocational way of life as distinct and definite as that laid down for soldiers, clergymen and doctors",[1] we already see quite clearly that so far as the *conditions* are concerned they are more or less fixed in the common labour market. But, says the critic, what about all the other advantages attaching to employment by the state? What, for instance, of the superannuation rights which place the civil servant in a privileged position above his fellows and to secure which he appears to make no tangible contribution? The short answer to that is that the rights do not exist, and that in a concealed form the contributions do. That may sound a little obscure but the fact is that there is nothing whatever in the Superannuation Acts which gives to the civil servant the slightest claim upon the state in the matter of pension. The act of 1834 made it clear that retiring allowances were entirely *ex gratia* and carried no statutory right to continuance. The allowance can be given or withheld at the discretion of the Treasury, and its amount can be varied in the light of changed circumstances. In actual practice this seldom occurs; but the power is there and undoubtedly would be exercised, particularly in cases of dismissal on political or other grounds before the retiring age had been reached.

The position with regard to the civil servant's contribution towards his own pension has never been clearly defined. Different conclusions have been reached at different points in time. After the passing of the 1834 act there seemed to be a general understanding that deductions were made and paid into a separate fund, but the archives produce very little evidence of this. An attempt by the staff to get superannuation defined as deferred pay was defeated in 1898, and so was a further attempt to put it on a straightforward contributory basis. The Treasury argued that "superannuation, as then

[1] Wm. A. Robson, *The British Civil Service.*

conceived, was an inducement to remain in the service of the state and as such it was a powerful aid to discipline".

The issue was again tested in 1906, when a case was taken to the courts under the Workmen's Compensation Act of 1906. An established civil servant had suffered permanent disablement during the course of his official duties and it was argued on his behalf that the superannuation allowance payable to him should not be taken into account in determining the amount of the compensation to be awarded. The argument was based on the contention that superannuation rights had been one of the factors in determining the salary of the grade to which he had been appointed, and that in effect, therefore, he had contributed for the full term of his employment towards the allowance he was now receiving from the state. Lord Buckmaster ruled however that the allowance was non-contributory, and that there was no evidence that salary had been fixed by reference to superannuation. The appeal was therefore rejected and there the matter rested until it became necessary to review the position in the light of the Civil Service implications of the Beveridge Report. To the general principles of Beveridge the Service has given complete assent. Through the staff side of the National Whitley Council, it has proclaimed its desire to enjoy its benefits and to pay for them in common with the rest of the community. There can be little doubt, however, that over and above these benefits the Service will insist not only upon the retention of existing superannuation rights, but the acceptance of full contractual obligation by the state and the payment of direct contribution. Within the sphere of local government, the public utilities, the banks, insurance companies and monopolies, contributory pension schemes are an established institution. Their aim and purpose in the context of private enterprise is in no sense influenced by considerations of social responsibility. As the Treasury argued in the case of the Civil Service they are rather "a powerful aid to discipline" but in another social context that will not be so, and meanwhile the civil servant's right to pension should be recognized, and then extended to cover every class of worker.

In one respect the Service spokesmen have joined issue with

Beveridge. The normal age of retirement for civil servants is 60. Beveridge, with an eye to population trends and a post-war community in which the higher age groups become increasingly disproportionate to the rest, puts this up to 65. At the same time, however, he has expressed the view that it would be a good thing if civil servants could leave the Service for other fields of endeavour at 50 or even earlier without sacrificing the whole of their pension. This and other aspects of the retirement problem are the subject of contentious debate in Service circles today. There is a fairly acute awareness of the difficulty of deciding an issue of this kind without some foreknowledge of the social and economic background of the immediate post-war world. There will be circumstances in which the Civil Service would leave itself free to fight for the principles of the earliest possible voluntary retirement with proportionate pension. In others, it might just as readily consent to go on working for just so long as it was necessary to reconstruct the social and economic life of the country on lines which would furnish ultimate compensations for earlier sacrifice. In just the same way, employees of the state will be prepared to contract in to the unemployment provisions of Beveridge, in the full knowledge that the majority of them would not in normal circumstances require to make claims under the section. The Civil Service, in short, is no longer anxious to preserve its existence as a privileged class. Its fate, as it well knows, is bound up with that of the general body of workers and it will ask no special conditions which it would not desire to concede to the rest.

In one respect civil servants can claim a very special interest in Beveridge. When the time comes to implement not only Beveridge but all the other reports still under Parliamentary consideration, it will become a job for the trained administrator and his assistants. Later in this book we shall reveal the extent to which they are already preparing themselves for that task.[1]

[1] The foregoing was written before the publication of the government's White Paper on social insurance. It can be taken that the Service view on Beveridge will be equally relevant to the government scheme, or that part which applies specifically to the payment of pensions.

CHAPTER 3

THE PROMOTION BUGBEAR

PROMOTION is one of the bugbears of the Civil Service. The structure of the state apparatus is, as we have seen, based on a hierarchy, each class in which has its own more or less clearly defined function in the general scheme of organization and administration. There is no straight run-through and although in theory every clerical officer can secure promotion out of his class, in practice he must, as things stand and with certain exceptions, be content to live out his Service life within the class which his educational opportunities and the economic position of his parents have earmarked for him. But within the classes there are grades—a hierarchy within a hierarchy—and the prospect of promotion from grade to grade is just as "powerful an aid to discipline" as the prospect of pension after forty years' service. For every carrot there are always hundreds of donkeys, each one striving to get his nose in front and to keep it there. No one can hope to get the British Civil Service into clear perspective unless he appreciates the extent to which its complex structure and its internal affairs are bound up with this infinity of gradings. This is not accidental or a phenomenon of purely Service significance, though admittedly it provides the most striking illustration of a class, and a class within a class society. It must be seen surely as a reflection or a special aspect of the general arrangements which govern that society and not something peculiar to the "bureaucracy". To show however how deeply entrenched in the mind of the Treasury this idea of a multiplicity of grades has become, the Association of Officers of Taxes, as it then was, fought a long campaign in order to get two of the grades within the clerical class employed in income-tax offices merged into one. It gave evidence before the Royal Commission in 1929 drawn from the practical experience of its members, clearly showing that in the interests of departmental efficiency

it was undesirable, and indeed impossible, to separate the work of the two grades. The Chairman of the Board of Inland Revenue, at that time Sir Ernest Gowers, had other views. In his own evidence he stated "that so strongly was he in favour of the two tiers as an abstract *principle* [my italics] that he would only say that if he were forced to the conclusion that the two-tiered system could not be adapted to the work of tax offices, it would be to his great regret". There I suggest was a revelation of an attitude which, in essence, expresses a reluctance to put the efficient performance of the work of the state before the paramount need to preserve intact a structure which divides and subdivides the staff, and creates a competitive spirit largely unrelated to a desire to give of one's best in the public service.

So far as the civil servant himself is concerned, his attitude towards promotion is compounded of two things—one is status and the other financial reward. For the administrative official status bulks larger than the cash that accompanies it. The reason for that we shall discuss in another chapter. The "other ranks" in the Service are for obvious reasons more inclined to place the emphasis on hard cash, but even with them status has its importance. This is only another aspect of that vocational separatism which successive governments and the Treasury itself have done so much to foster. The impact of events, and particularly the war itself, are beginning to break this down; but traditions upon which the Service has been nourished for a hundred and fifty years quite naturally die hard.

A former Director of Establishments of the Inland Revenue, in a talk to Establishment Officers in 1942, produced three axioms for the guidance of his colleagues. The first was that civil servants were not there for promotion, but that promotion was there in order to ensure the well-being of the organization by providing civil servants of this or that kind and in such numbers as are required. The second was that the selection of people for promotion was properly determined by the good that their promotion would bring to the organization in which they served—which was only another way of saying the same

thing; and the third that the governing authority must take entire responsibility for building human material into the fabric and should regard that as one of its most vital concerns.[1]

These propositions quite naturally aroused a storm of controversy. They raised of course the whole question of seniority or merit as the guiding principles in the selection of officers for promotion to higher grades. They proceeded on the assumption that promotion was in no sense a reward for services rendered but a recognition rather that there were still more valuable services to come. They challenged the view that promotion was in effect a sort of remuneration, something to which the individual civil servant was entitled as by right and for which he would naturally qualify, subject to the maintenance of a given standard of work and conduct, in the normal course of events. But they overlooked the very fact to which throughout this book we are trying to draw attention—namely that the Civil Service does not operate *in vacuo* and that the Rotarian motto of "service, not self" represents a standard, possible of achievement only in the context of a system in which it will be possible to attach far more importance to the job and the doing of it than to the prestige, status, or even, beyond a certain point, the remuneration of the individual performing the job.

We shall see when we come to discuss plans for the post-war reconstruction of the Civil Service, now occupying much of the time of the Service unions, that state employees themselves are quite prepared under certain safeguards to endorse the principle of promotion solely by merit. Its full acceptance however, will depend upon the removal of the frustrations and futilities which in present circumstances cause promotion to be regarded as something very well worth while for its own sake.

All this was to some extent argued before the Tomlin Commission in 1929, when the representatives of the staff put forward the claim that "in view of the speculative nature of the reporting system, promotion should be by seniority subject to fitness". The Commission refused to accept that view and "deprecated the exercise of pressure designed to stress the

[1] W. V. Bradford, *Principles of Promotion*—a paper.

claims of seniority as against exceptional merit." To express the point of difference in its simplest terms, it comes to this. Should an employee of the state receive promotion strictly in his turn, and subject only to a certificate of his fitness to do the work he will be required to perform in the grade to which he is promoted, or shall promotion rest on a basis of "let the best man win" irrespective of age or seniority? Now it would be immeasurably easier to solve that problem if the machinery for assessing the respective qualities of any given number of would-be promotees could be regarded as foolproof; but that is just what it is not. The essential feature of the promotion system in the Civil Service is the annual report. This is made upon a form, only to look at which is calculated to give any reporting officer a sick headache.

Upon it he is required to appraise annually the quality of every officer eligible for promotion, under the following headings:—manner and address; energy; courage; leadership; penetration; constructive power; judgment and common-sense; output; quality and, in the case of supervising officers, effectiveness of organization and method, and in respect of each one of these categories, he is to state whether the subject of the report is outstanding, very good, satisfactory, indifferent or poor. (There is no marking, be it observed, for N.B.G.) That one might regard as more than enough, but now, after taking on the job of a first-class psychiatrist, he must go on to a summing up of his conclusions in terms of the officers' qualifications for promotion. He will say in fact whether Mr. X is exceptionally well qualified, fully qualified, qualified, or not yet qualified to undertake the duties of the grade to which he may or, as is more likely, may not be promoted. It is only necessary to add that in one department alone there are something like 1,200 separate and distinct reporting officers and as many countersigning officers, each with his own standards, prejudices, foibles and the rest, for the difficulties inseparable from any promotion system to be appreciated. Can it be wondered that, with the scepticism bordering on cynicism to which these methods have given rise, a large part of the staff has tended to over-emphasize the

virtues of seniority? It is just as natural that the other part containing within it the younger and more up-and-coming elements should prefer to risk the hazards of the present system on the off-chance of a win, if only by a short head, in the race for promotion. Meanwhile for the period of the war there has been an attempt at compromise between the two principles with results which have made promotion an even more speculative business than it was before. Not only that, but in accordance with a policy to which the staff representatives have been assenting partners, all wartime promotions are on an acting basis with no guarantee that the holder of the post will not revert to his former grade when the time for the inevitable stocktaking arrives.

Given the hierarchical character of the British Civil Service it can safely be asserted that there is no real solution of the promotion problem. The carrot system was devised only indirectly to improve the efficiency of the Service. Its main purpose is to provide a spur to energies which might otherwise flag and to keep the official nose to the departmental grindstone.

The solution will only come with the introduction of new incentives to individual effort and a reconstructed Civil Service, which, promotion apart, will provide ample scope and satisfactory conditions within the limits of a particular grade or class. Only then will it be possible to apply, without modification, the principle of promotion by reference to fitness, for here again we are confronted only with one facet of the general problem of "getting on in the world", the solution of which lies in the assumption of collective responsibilities for the achievement of individual benefits.

CHAPTER 4

THE HOUSING PROBLEM

In no direction does the state lag so far behind the other large employers of labour as in the matter of accommodation for those who serve it and the provision of equipment to enable them to carry out their tasks with reasonable efficiency. Many government offices are glorified dustbins compared with those which house the employees of the banks, insurance companies, and many of the larger industrial concerns. For a number of years after the last war, employment exchange staffs carrying a heavy load of responsibility, and paying out thousands of pounds of government money, were working in unbelievable conditions. The people who assess and collect your tax were not much better off and in 1929 their spokesmen uttered a vigorous protest against standards which in their view were "a disgrace to a country so far advanced in the development of technical processes applied to building construction and office equipment". The Royal Commission to whom the protest was addressed, while agreeing that some of the government offices visited by them were definitely unsuitable, felt nevertheless that any large programme for the rehousing of the staff might involve a serious increase in expenditure. This, they thought, should not deter the good employer from providing up-to-date housing and equipment for his staff and they expressed the pious view that the state would stand to gain in efficiency as a result of the outlay involved. Whereupon some small improvement was effected. In 1937, however, the position was still so bad that the same staff union responsible for bringing the matter to the notice of the Royal Commission took matters a stage further and secured the services of the National Institute of Industrial Psychology for the purpose of undertaking a thorough investigation into the conditions in which tax officials were required to carry out their duties. It will

be of interest to summarize some of its principal conclusions:

1. The 1929 standards in operation allow only for a bare minimum of accommodation and equipment and show little consideration for the convenience and comfort of the staff.
2. The open office principle has been introduced without due regard to the problems created thereby. The resultant conditions are in no way conducive to hard work and efficiency.
3. The psychological factors affecting the clerical worker in the efficient performance of his duties are being disregarded.
4. The rigid economy and degree of control exercised by the Office of Works in matters affecting accommodation is a contributory cause of the loss of efficiency involved.
5. This loss, estimated at not less than 15 per cent, is equivalent in salaries alone to a sum of half a million pounds a year. The expenditure of only part of this sum on improved environmental conditions, apart from benefit to the staff, would increase the quality and efficiency of the work with ultimate advantage to the Exchequer.

The report of which the foregoing is a summing up cost the union in question over £300 and it provided a damning indictment of the cheeseparing methods which condemned thousands of state employees to all the discomforts and inconveniences of "slum" standards of office accommodation. The frustration of working with equipment, much of it of the Heath Robinson type, which was never designed to fit the needs of a modern state apparatus, was also brought to light. Copies of the report were sent to all heads of departments and the responsible ministries, but by the time they got around to it the present war was upon us.

Since then of course even 1929 standards have suffered some deterioration, and it will require a whole decade and a completely different approach to fit government offices for the functions required of them in the post-war world. That new

approach will only arise out of a realization on the part of the general public that it is *their* Civil Service and that it can only serve it adequately and efficiently in the best environmental conditions. No plans for the architectural reconstruction of Britain will be complete which do not provide in every town and city for a nobly designed civic centre around which not only the municipal buildings but the local offices of every government department are grouped. Complete accessibility to the public, modern design and equipment, and perfect sanitary and psychological conditions should be the minimum requirements to secure the efficient discharge of public business and no time should be lost in fulfilling them when the war has been won.

CHAPTER 5

BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

THE British Civil Service, like every other social institution, has passed through a number of phases. If therefore we are to see it in perspective, we should be well employed in sketching its development from rudimentary beginnings up to the present time, when it has become, for good or ill, an enormous influence in the management of our affairs. It is just as unhelpful to describe it in the words of Winston Churchill as "the finest Civil Service in the world" as to refer, as others in less flattering terms have done, to the swollen hordes of the bureaucracy which batten on the lives of a people who only desire to be left to their own devices, unless at the same time we examine more closely its origin and its purpose. A little history then. The Civil Service, in the form with which we are now familar, is a growth of no more than a hundred or so years, though long before that time some sketchy form of state apparatus existed. In the sixteenth century for instance the state functionary was little more than the personal attendant of the sovereign.

There was no great measure of control over the activities of the early colonizers, and provided that a proportion of the revenues acquired as a result of those activities found its way into the royal coffers there was no inclination on anyone's part to curb the adventurous spirit of the pioneers of the mercantile age. By the end of the century Elizabeth had granted charters for the exploitation of the East Indies and other territories and thereby ensured a sufficient rake-off without at the same time incurring an administrative responsibility. Later, with the achievement of the bourgeois revolution, a Council of State to act for administrative purposes as a committee of the House of Commons was set up.

Hitherto, Parliament had been little more than an advisory body to the king, but with the increasing expense of govern-

ment and the reduction of feudal revenues, the state and the king became separate entities. This statement should, perhaps, be qualified. The king still remained and does to this day an integral part of the state power. It is in his name, for instance, that all Orders in Council are published.

It is still, however, true that the Cromwellian revolution transferred, in theory at least, the larger functions of the state from king to Parliament.

The state, however, was for some time little more than a name and with the Restoration its officials were once again appointed largely by reference to their royalist sympathies. An act passed in 1661 for instance created a body of commissioners vested with the witch-finding function of hunting out and removing at uncontrolled discretion all officers deemed to be "unsafe". Many of the normal functions of the state were carried out by the sheriffs and justices who combined in their own persons the offices of revenue official, sanitary superintendent and dispenser of the law. They constituted what might be described as an unpaid Civil Service and they retained many of their functions until they were superseded towards the end of the nineteenth century by bodies set up by local-government authorities. In 1659 we read of Pepys seated in his office receiving money for the probate of wills, and in the same year Sir Robert Pye the auditor of the Exchequer was committed to the Tower as a royalist. In 1690 with William of Orange on the throne, the forerunner of a long line of Royal Commissions set up to examine the state of the exchequer discovered that vast sums had been allotted to secret services and that no regular accounts had been kept for over thirty years. Also that fees had been extracted from the public by way of percentages in all public offices.[1]

It was soon after this that one of our greatest institutions, the National Debt, was created. War was becoming an increasingly costly business and could only be paid for by raising money at high rates of interest and repaying loans made previously at a lower rate, and very often by the same people.

[1] Prof. E. Jenks, *Parliamentary England.*

One effect of this was to create a big vested interest in the maintenance of the financial *status quo*, thus ensuring the equilibrium of the capitalist state structure, in very much the same way as the more recent attempts at stabilization to-day by the floating of war loans to which all and sundry are invited to subscribe. There is always a natural tendency on the part of the governing class to assume that a nation of savings-certificate holders will oppose itself to any sort of economic change calculated to rob it of the fruits of its thriftiness.

However, be that as it may, attempts to liquidate the National Debt by diverting part of the state revenue into a sinking fund proved abortive, and the result was an accumulation of capital to enable further wars to be waged, trading with other countries to be increased, colonies to be developed and the productive forces of the country to be infinitely expanded. In a sentence, the capitalist system was born and the stage cleared for the Industrial Revolution. Before then, however we saw a period of colonial expansion. In one unbroken chain of cause and effect we saw also the creation of a professional army to conquer and keep the territories due for exploitation, the vast extension of manufacture required for the maintenance of that army, and the artificially created booms arising from the widespread speculation in which so many of the new rich were tempted to engage.

Can it be wondered that given these expansionist tendencies and the increasing need therefore to raise the wind, Horace Walpole should have occasion to refer to the growing influence of finance and to assert that "taxation had become the rudder of government"?

Is it not clear too that the state officials were very largely preoccupied with the financial side of government and in effect little more than a committee of ways and means? It need occasion no surprise therefore that by the time the younger Pitt appeared on the scene the finances of the country imposed upon someone the obligation of a clean-up.

Thus it was that the Consolidated Fund was introduced, a Commission for the Auditing of Public Accounts created and in 1798 the fiscal device of a direct tax on incomes brought

into existence. For the enlightenment of twelve million taxpayers now groaning under the burden of a standard rate of 10s. in the £, be it recalled that the first income tax was on a graduated scale rising from twopence to two shillings, with an exemption limit of £60.

It was designed as a temporary expedient to tide the country over the period of the French wars; but it proved so successful for its purpose that, apart from one short break in its continuity, it has remained a cardinal feature of our budgetary system ever since.

Now, having sketched in that very slight historical background, we can have another look at the Civil Service to see what shape it was beginning to assume and what factors, social and economic, were moulding its destinies and determining the general trend of its development.

It will be an interesting exercise to note its gradual growth and observe the adaptations of its structure as imposed upon it by the clamant needs of the thrusting, thriving capitalism which had begun to take over the instruments of production from its predecessors.

Before we proceed to this, however, we shall again take note of the ebb and flow of the state power in its changing relations with the productive system. The mercantile system of the eighteenth century which created a Civil Service to give authority to its expansionist aims and to finance its projects, sowed the seeds of the *laissez-faire* era of capitalism which was to come after it. In this later phase, the general tendency was toward keeping the state in its place and reducing its interference in trade and industry to the barest minimum. We shall see later with what degree of success or failure *laissez-faire* capitalism achieved this object. We shall also see that as capitalism, in its turn, became more monopolistic in character so the state, faithfully reflecting the trend, became more and more involved in the economic arrangements of the country.

At the end of the eighteenth century the machinery of state provided for a Home Department to which colonial administration was attached as a sideline, a Foreign Department concerned wholly with Europe and the United States, a

Treasury dealing with revenue and accounts and the naval and military departments with their various branches. The Post Office was in its infancy and only 291 officers were employed in the tax offices. On the other hand the greater incidence of indirect taxation created the need for a Customs and Excise Department which employed a disproportionate number of the total civil servants (no more than 16,000 in all) on the strength. The Navy, Army and War Departments between them gave work to no more than 400 clerical and administrative officials, few more probably than were employed by the Alien Office, the Lottery Office and the Registrar of Colonial Slaves. There were, of course, no social service departments.

The tremendous expansion of British industry, side by side with the exploitation of recently acquired colonial territories, brought into existence a large urban proletariat. There was a drift to the towns and with increasing industrialization a rapid development of the home market. The heavy industries began to boom—so necessarily did transport. Inevitably, therefore, industrial processes were more and more brought under direct capitalist control; all of which had its repercussions on the machinery of state.

Capitalist production demanded all sorts of facilities which were not profitable for itself to provide. A regular postal system became a prime necessity. Roads were built and their maintenance and repair must become a social responsibility with the cost charged to the general body of taxpayers. Private property was being accumulated and its protection required the introduction of "law and order" with the necessary functionaries and organization to enforce it. Colonial development again increased the work and widened the functions of the central government. The middle of the century, for instance, brought "the brightest jewel of the imperial crown" under direct British rule, and the profits of investment here and elsewhere, in the ever-expanding empire, had to be safeguarded by a Civil Service at home and abroad, specially trained in the technique of colonial administration.

It is true that the principle of *laissez-faire* was being widely advertised and that with the creation of new industries and

techniques under the spur of free competition and free trade, Britain was gradually building up a monopoly position in the world's markets. This, however, was not inconsistent with a progressive reliance on the organs of government for the backing and support which, having regard to their class character, the administrations of the day were only too happy to give.

As Engels said, "Times were good for British capitalists". Political issues, apart from the exchange of a few shibboleths, were subordinated to economic issues. The administration adopted its new role of holding the ring while private enterprise established itself, and of ensuring that its operations were allowed to continue without undue interference from other interests. One of those interests was of course that very urban proletariat to which reference has already been made and which had been called into being by the new and rapidly expanding productive processes. The horrible poverty and conditions of labour which accompanied these processes represented "a new economic phenomenon due to unfettered competition and unrestricted individual ownership of the means of production",[1] and gave rise inevitably to an agitation for shortening hours of labour and for a measure of protective factory legislation.

For some time, as we know, every attempt to improve industrial legislation, particularly in regard to the employment of juveniles, was resisted in the name of commercial liberty. The progenitors of the Balfours and the Benns were preaching then from the same text as the anti-planners of today, that the state should let well alone. Indeed, we learn that a certain legal luminary who was particularly successful in his advocacy, on behalf of the manufacturers, of this doctrine of non-interference, was rewarded with "a present of plate". Another important point to observe is the change that was taking place in the attitude of the rising trade union movement. With the expansion of capitalism and a dawning recognition of its increasing stability, the more radical and revolutionary content of the organizations of the workers was transformed. The

[1] Sydney and Beatrice Webb, *History of British Trade Unionism.*

trade unions had painfully and by very slow steps won their struggle for recognition, and direct action made way for collective negotiation and the initiation of ameliorative legislation.

The first Factory Act applying only to the textile industry was passed in 1802. It was amended in 1825 and 1831. In 1833 further legislation introduced the half-time system, closely bound up with the contemporary introduction of compulsory education.

Another act in 1844 brought about an improvement in hours and conditions, and in 1847 the ten-hour day was, in theory at least, made compulsory in certain industries. In brief, the first half of the nineteenth century saw the inevitable abandonment of the principle of *laissez-faire* in its logical application. Not only public indignation, but the wiser counsels of the more farsighted capitalists were forcing the state to take a hand in the game. By restrictive and regulative legislation it sought to prevent the greedier representatives of the new capitalist class from destroying the source of the surplus value upon which their opportunity to develop must henceforth depend. And even then there was far more form than substance about most of this reformist legislation. For much of its effectiveness in checking the abuses at which it was directed it relied upon government inspectors whose functions were described in the accompanying regulations. It would be profitable here to delay the action of this short historical survey in order to look a little more closely at the work of the inspectorial staff, for here is the civil servant who, perhaps more than most others, knows at first hand where the shoe pinches and to what extent the great mass of remedial legislation placed upon the statute book during a period of a century and a half has eased the pressure. Here is what Marx had to say on the subject quoted from the chapter of *Capital* dealing with the Factory Acts: "The Workshops Regulation Act, wretched in all its details, remained a dead letter in the hands of the municipal and local authorities who were charged with its execution. When, in 1871, Parliament withdrew from them this power, in order to confer it on the Factory Inspectors, to whose province it thus added at a single stroke more than

one hundred thousand workshops . . . care was taken at the same time not to add more than eight assistants to their already undermanned staff."

Marx goes on to tell us that the personnel before this handsome addition comprised only two inspectors, two assistant-inspectors and forty-one sub-inspectors and that the total cost of administering both this act and the Factory Acts Extension Act amounted to no more than £25,347 for the year 1871–2. Can it be wondered that Marx with the biting irony of which he was at times a master contrasted "the necessity imposed on the parliament of the ruling classes, of adopting in principle measures so extraordinary, and on so great a scale, against the excesses of capitalist exploitation; and on the other hand, the hesitation, the repugnance, and the bad faith, with which it lent itself to the task of carrying those measures into practice".

Later on Marx makes a similar criticism of the Mines Inspecting Act of 1860, which enacted that boys between the ages of ten and twelve should, unless they had already received the school certificate, attend school for a certain number of hours. This act, he tells us, became a complete dead letter owing to the ridiculously small number of inspectors and the meagreness of their powers.

In 1866 we find (again quoting Marx) that a parliamentary committee examined a number of witnesses on working conditions in the mines. One inspector giving evidence before the committee was asked if the mines in his area were sufficiently inspected to ensure compliance with the provisions of the Act and replied that they were not inspected at all. He went on to volunteer the information that there was one available inspector to look after more than 130 collieries. Clearly the lot of the government inspector in the early days of Britain's industrial development was not a happy one.

Things have improved a little since then, of course, but so far as the mining industry is concerned, then and now, there can be no official so harassed and frustrated as the government inspector, or so convinced of the futility of the tasks allotted to him.

What is true of the factory and mines inspectors is equally true of those employed by the Board of Education to examine and report on the health of school children. We find, for instance, that although in 1933 these inspectors carried out 1,855,499 routine inspections, discovering *inter alia* that in 11·1 per 1,000 cases treatment was required for some form or other of malnutrition and that over 36 per cent of all the children examined were in one way or another defective, the immediate improvements suggested that the inspections were little more than a formality.

Or take yet another aspect of the inspectorial work of the Civil Service. Here is an Inspector of Refuse employed by the Ministry of Health and reporting as recently as 1929 that London refuse dumps were nothing but extensive fly-feeding belts, a menace to health as well as a waste of consumable fuel.

Or turn to the Third Report from the Select Committee on National Expenditure, 1942–3, on the health and welfare of women in war factories. After stressing the need for a satisfactory industrial medical service, it proceeds to give a well-earned boost to the existing factory inspectorate "for maintaining efficiency in exceptionally difficult circumstances".

Point is given to this eulogy when we learn that there are only 400 inspectors to a quarter of a million factories, from which the reader will see that in the period between 1866 and 1942 the capitalist state has fully maintained its reputation for niggardliness so far as this section of its apparatus is concerned.

The results are revealed in the report itself which stated that "the Ministry of Labour lacks the organization necessary even to deal fully with day-to-day problems" and later "that the Ministry of Supply factories are in some cases abusing their position by allowing hours of work longer than the factory inspectors would authorize", while "the attitude of the Ministry of Aircraft Production on health and welfare matters has been definitely unsatisfactory".

If there is still any doubt as to the social importance of the work of the factory inspectorate, a glance at the report of

the Chief Inspector of Factories for 1943 will be sufficient to dispel it. Here are one or two brief extracts. This on accidents: "We have no indication which would lead us to think that safe practices impede output. Inspectors are convinced, in fact, that those factories where organization for output is best are, in general, the most free from accident." And on ventilation, "Factories are still being found that at night are practically sealed boxes. Much misery might be saved it if were made a legal necessity for all new buildings to be approved by the factory inspector." And finally, on canteens: "There was a progressive increase during the year in the number of firms which set up canteen works' committees of an advisory nature."

Where is the moral in all this? Surely it lies in a recognition by the general public that things are going on inside the Civil Service which are their own intimate concern. We shall be refuting later, and with some vigour, the charge of bureaucracy made by certain interested persons against the great body of civil servants. We suggest in advance that the reports from which we have quoted at some length certainly lend no colour to the accusation, so far at least as the government inspectorate is concerned; the demand from the public must be for more rather than less of them. They must be men and women with a thorough knowledge of the workers' point of view and psychologically equipped to secure the best results in terms of working conditions as well as output. They must have a high sense of social responsibility and resist every attempt on the part of the administration to reduce their function to a formality.

To return, however, to our history, it is undoubtedly true that in the middle of the nineteenth century we saw the first faint beginnings of a working partnership, unrecognized and often repudiated, but none the less existent, between the private controllers of production and the public administrators, concerned almost wholly with determining the status and conditions of the producers.

With this phase, the Civil Service can be said to have arrived. A whole range of new functions was brought within

its ambit. Its role both in relation to the new ruling class and the growing army of industrial and agricultural workers began to take shape. To examine only two illustrations; the Board of Trade which had been little more than a consultative body became active in a dozen directions. New trading concerns were waiting to be registered. Some sort of statistical research had to be undertaken, the development of road and rail transport needed to be guided, if not controlled, and a watchful eye kept on the balance of trade which, in its commercial relations with other countries, was the keystone of the capitalist arch. The other illustration concerns the growth of functions of the Home Department in relation to poor law administration, the work of inspection arising out of the Factory Acts and the legislation concerned with the employment and conditions of labour.

New functions required a new personnel—nothing short in fact of a completely reconditioned state apparatus. Up to the middle of the nineteenth century there had been no co-ordinated body of civil servants, graded and classified according to function, with uniform methods of recruitment and scales of remuneration. Jobbery and nepotism flooded the state service with incompetents and illiterates. Duties were completely undefined and an official on a scale of salary proper to the administrative class was, as likely as not, discharging the functions of the lowest grade of official. Pepys, with the delightful candour which characterizes the pages of his diary, has given us a good insight into all that, and the state of affairs which he so artlessly describes can be said to have continued with only slight amendment right up to the year 1854, when a Select Committee on Public Expenditure made an attempt at cleansing the stable. The report of this committee contained recommendations for the segregation of certain types of work, a method of recruitment by open competition and promotion by merit. The effect of these far-reaching proposals on the diehards of the day was shattering, particularly when the report was followed by another which urged that the Civil Service should be organized in accordance with the highest standards of efficiency and that "there should be no com-

promise with the existing practice of subordinating the Service to the exigencies of party policy".

Further fuel was added to the fire when the report went on to express the view "that while no pains had been taken to secure a good man for a particular office, nothing had subsequently been done to turn such abilities as he had to good account" (a condemnation on two counts) and that "any success attained would not depend upon exertion—in short, if they wasted their time it would not hold them back".

Parliamentary and Service reactions to this report were unfavourable. Resentment at the charge of incompetence was accompanied by a defence of jobbery which according to one government spokesman was "a part though admittedly an ugly part of the price which a free people pay for their constitutional liberty". Another member of the government feared that "open competition would result in the service being packed with clever young men from the lower ranks of society and that a lower tone would thereby prevail." What a familiar ring it all has. Another interesting reaction came from the educational authorities who saw in the proposal for open recruitment a chance to give a fillip to the public schools and private coaches by providing an additional objective.

Even today those of us who are once again approaching the task of Civil Service reconstruction are meeting with this strange point of view, which insists that the primary purpose of state employment is not to get the work done but to provide an incentive for educational advancement. A curious example of the cart before the horse, though we entirely agree with the view that "the relationship of Civil Service recruitment to the educational system is one which needs constant adjustment".[1]

It is fascinating to observe how the experiences of today in the sphere of Civil Service reform repeat at a higher level those of a hundred years ago. Then, as now, it required the impact of war to bring about improvements which previous researches and recommendations had failed to achieve. On this occasion it was the Crimean War which frightened the governing class of the country into some sort of appreciation

[1] Emmeline Cohen, *History of the British Civil Service.*

of the situation which a completely unorganized Civil Service was helping to create. War as we know always succeeds in turning a searchlight on administrative processes and if we have read our Florence Nightingale we know to what extent chaos and incompetence contributed towards the waste of life and material which caused even the capitalists to demand an overhaul.

They discovered in fact that a 'free for all' inside the Civil Service was adversely affecting the far more important 'free for all' outside. Commissioners appointed in 1855 discovered that "of 1,000 nominees to the higher Civil Service, 300 were grossly ignorant",[1] and once again the open recruitment controversy raged. The 'antis' attacked it on the grounds that "it would turn thousands of posts in the service of the British Empire into exhibitions for poor scholars". The 'pros' defended it because "it would introduce a new spirit of economy and industry". Both schools were quite obviously concerned only with its results on the development of private enterprise but with greater vision the latter could see that capitalism was bound in course of time to become less individualistic and that it would require at its back a better-organized Civil Service. It would need, of course, to be one which, persuaded of its limitations, would consent to go so far with the control of industrial conditions, but no further. Finally, the 'pros' won and open competition was introduced to become thereafter the principal method of recruitment to the state service.

It should not be assumed that this admittedly great reform brought to an abrupt end the era of patronage and jobbery within the Service. Its main purpose was to create the efficiency necessary for the proper functioning of the industrial state and by a system of examination to ensure a flow of reasonably intelligent recruits to its service. More than fifteen years were to elapse, however, before the full fruits of open competition could be gathered. Meanwhile, the field of candidature was artificially restricted by an insistence on nomination as a prior condition to sitting for an examination. For some time, there-

[1] Emmeline Cohen, *History of the British Civil Service.*

fore, place-hunting was still the order of the day and all that could be said was that the family fool now had to overcome a very genuine difficulty before he could make his way into the Civil Service preserve.

Even to this day the principle of nomination is followed in the case of appointments to the Foreign Office—a factor not without some significance in the light of the bungling and worse which have characterized our diplomatic relations with other countries during the period between the two wars.

By the year 1870, however, the open competition method of recruitment had taken a firm hold throughout the larger part of the state service and with its advent other difficulties arose. The partial solution of the recruitment problem in itself gave rise to further problems of grading and personnel.

Until then departmentalism had been rigidly applied. Each of the State Departments had its own hierarchy and as we have seen there had been no attempt to define duties. It took another fourteen years to get the principle of the division of labour fully recognized, and in 1874 the Service was reorganized on a basis of higher and lower divisions. Of the latter class it was recommended that "their pay should only exceed the market rate by as much as would secure the best of that class of labour". Promotion from one division to another was discouraged on the ground that, in the words of the Chancellor of the Exchequer of the time, "there would be a difficulty in promoting a gentleman from the lower division because it was education which gave a man the status required in dealing with the world when representing his office". Another significant fact to be borne in mind is that when the lower division clerks all of whom were recruited from a common source into a common grade took the opportunity of forming a protective association, the Treasury—again through the Chancellor—argued strongly in favour of splitting the grade. The reason was obvious. To use his own words again, "they were exerting a political influence and acting like one man". Too bad. Jumping across another fourteen years a further landmark of Service development was created in 1888 by the introduction of mechanical processes. It is astounding

to recollect that prior to that year most of the copying work of the State Departments was carried on by a special grade of copyists. Typewriters, although already in fairly common use in the commercial world, were unknown in the Service and when one at last found its way into the sacred precincts of a State Department, there was no one with the ability to use it. The truth is that the prejudice against the employment of women in the service of the state was at that time so great that rather than make a breach with tradition the Treasury preferred to play King Canute to the advancing tide of mechanical development in office organization. It is greatly to be feared that their descendants are still with us today, in uncomfortably large numbers.

However, the reluctance of the Treasury was finally overcome and typists who, to quote the then chairman of the Board of Inland Revenue, "could perform work for 23s. a week which male copyists would regard as justifying promotion", were graciously permitted to work for the state. We are expected to assume maybe that some at least of those who entered on "a vocational way of life" (to quote Dr. Robson again) were required at the same time to take a vow of poverty.

We are now in a position to sum up the principal reforms which took place within the Service up to the end of the nineteenth century; mentioning only those which, in accordance with our declared object of revealing the social and economic sources of its development, are relevant to our general thesis. First then there was the institution of a more reliable accounting and audit system to put an end to the peculation and graft which had formerly disfigured the public service. The "integrity" of the Service and its freedom from nepotism were thereby assured. There followed the alteration of the system whereby state employees had been little more than the appendages of individual ministers. Henceforth they were to be, in the terms of our original definition, "the paid administrators or clerks of the state". Then, after a long struggle, the introduction of open competition, promotion by merit (at least in theory) and the division of the Service into

grades in accordance with more or less clearly defined functions. Which brings us to a final period of growth and expansion, the assumption of Treasury control and the attempt to weld the Civil Service into a unified whole with its own traditions and its own code. A significant feature of a large part of all these reforms is the accompanying emphasis placed on the need for the strictest economy in public administration. A whole series of government committees devoted themselves almost exclusively to a task imposed upon them by those who then, as now, wanted to get an efficient Civil Service on the cheap.

The subsequent history of the Civil Service has so far been one of continuous development and expansion. We shall be able in a later section of this book to determine the economic factors which have brought about this growth and we shall see how the two strands of social reform and state encouragement and protection of private enterprise are woven into the fabric of the Civil Service to provide its general pattern up to the beginning of the present war.

It is only necessary to add that so far as the structure of the Service and the principles of recruitment, pay and promotion upon which it is based are concerned, there has been little modification. Practically all that the Tomlin Commission of 1929 did was to reaffirm those principles and to resist any attempt at socially desirable innovation on the plea of national economy.

CHAPTER 6

THE POLICY MAKERS

THE general rules laid down for the conduct of civil servants carry the implication of undeviating loyalty to the state irrespective of what government may be in power.

No attempt, quite naturally, has ever been made by those responsible for framing these rules to define the state, and one is left to assume that they would do anything to avoid such a responsibility. It must be assumed also that if they were forced to produce a formula it would be one which gave to the state a conception of something which functioned on behalf and was fully representative of society as a whole—otherwise surely it would be unreasonable to expect the unquestioning loyalty of those who served it. But what if we were to proceed on a somewhat different assumption—one for instance which regarded the state as "a special category of people set apart to rule others and who in the interests and with the purpose of rule, systematically and permanently command a certain apparatus of coercion",[1] or, as "a product of society at a certain stage in development. A power arising out of society but placing itself above it for the purpose of moderating the conflicting economic interests to which capitalist society gives rise"[2]? Would it not be possible to assert, in the light of what we have already learned of the history of the British Civil Service and even from the conditions of its own employment, the superior validity of these last two assumptions over the first? Should we not be compelled to agree also that none of the development described in the previous chapter has altered the essential character of a state "moulded by the needs of those who control the means of production"?[3]

Is it not true that the state is still "an instrument to maintain the power of a class"[4] rather than "the representative of the sum total of the popular will"[5] in spite of the fact that in

[1] *Lenin on the State.*
[2] Engels, *Origin of the Family.* [3] Ibid. [4] Ibid. [5] Ibid.

the circumstances imposed by the war the state and its apparatus seem to have a certain independence both in relation to the capital class on the one hand and the workers standing in opposition to that class on the other? Let us see how all this works out in relation to the general exhortation to civil servants to be impartially loyal to the state, irrespective of government, and the extent to which the rule is observed in the higher ranks of the Service. We shall require to remember that in this, as in everything else, the law of action and reaction applies.

The Service has in every respect been moulded by the ecomomic context in which it operates, but in its turn it has influenced the general trend of social and economic policy in no small measure. This influence has been exerted in two ways, positively through the policy-making function of the administrative civil servant and negatively through the dead weight of inertia, which has operated always to secure the maintenance of the *status quo*. These qualities are not so much characteristic of the higher Civil Service as such, as of the deep-rooted Toryism which until recently set the tone for it. In its positive aspect it will be useful to examine the case of Sir Horace Wilson, regarded by many as the evil genius of Neville Chamberlain during the most disastrous period of British foreign policy on record. It is impossible of course to say whether Sir Horace would have served the state with equal zeal, irrespective of the government of the day. All we are entitled to say is that although, as the official head of the Civil Service, his real job was, in the words of the Lord Chancellor, "the central oversight of the machinery of government", he did not hesitate at the request of the then Prime Minister to advise him on matters normally outside the range of his official duties. The rest is, perhaps, conjecture, although there is solid ground for the belief that he could hardly have given to a Churchill administration, and still less, shall we say, to an Attlee administration, the sort of 'loyalty' he placed so unreservedly at the disposal of his Munichite chief. The duties of the Permanent Secretary to the Treasury certainly included that of advising the Prime Minister on appointments to certain senior posts in the Service, etc.

(again, I quote the Lord Chancellor), but that hardly included within its scope the far more important task of guiding him through the complexities of foreign policy, especially when that policy leads to the disastrous ends we now see. Lord Vansittart was another distinguished civil servant. *His* advice was not welcomed by the Chamberlain Administration, and he went as we know into the wilderness. But holding the views he does on the completely unregenerate character of the whole German race, one wonders to what extent he also could have occupied a high administrative post under any government whose views on racial theory for instance ran completely counter to his own.

The point to be made here, and it cannot be too strongly emphasized, is that loyalty in the long run is bound to depend upon individual outlook and opinion, as determined very largely by economic and social conditions. So far as the upper ranks of the Civil Service are concerned it will be given in its fullness only when the government of the day represents most faithfully the interests of the class from which they come.

If the government is changed for one which more nearly approximates to the needs and desires (not always consciously expressed) of what Henry Wallace called "the common man", then, I suggest, the influence of the majority of representatives of this class will be expressed more in terms of obstruction and inertia.

These are very potent reasons for the fears entertained by the aforesaid common man when, for example, the appointment of Sir James Grigg as political head of the War Office was announced. Immediately prior to that appointment Sir James had occupied the post of Permanent Secretary in the same Department of State. He was, in short, and notwithstanding a considerable reputation for ruthless innovation, a civil servant of the old school, steeped in its governing-class traditions and averse to any fundamental departure from the *status quo*. We have seen how on occasion after occasion he has run true to type and how in the interest of the reactionary politics in which he is steeped, he has done his best to keep the

army, for the well-being of which he is responsible, in political blinkers. Here surely is the classic case of the 'non-political' administrative civil servant becoming rabidly political overnight by a change from one room to another in the same building.

As for the rest of the Civil Service, there are already signs that what was once a job like any other is coming to be regarded as a responsibility, not so much to the state or the government of the day, as to the people. It would be an exaggeration to assert that there has been a serious attempt, except on the part of a growing minority, to define that responsibility in terms, but there is the beginning of an awareness that loyalty, like patriotism, is too vague a concept and that "community sense" might be the better term to express their own sense of what is fitting. But let us get back to the policy-making civil servant. If we can get some idea of his background and the door through which he enters the service of the state we shall be better able to judge of his disinterestedness, or otherwise. We have already spoken of the part played by the Crimean War in bringing about a measure of Civil Service reform. Much of the public criticism aroused by the mishandling of that particular war effort was focused upon the administrative class. Attempts were made to put an end to influences which it was alleged were burdening every department with incompetent officers and they were sufficiently successful to secure the appointment of a body henceforth to be known as the Civil Service Commissioners. This put an end to the era of appointment by patronage and ensured that subsequent appointees should at least possess some qualifications for the job they were required to do.

We can discuss later what that job was. Let us first examine the method by which the qualifications were tested. The examination system has been the object of praise and condemnation in almost equal measure ever since its introduction getting on for a hundred years ago. Its advocates see in it the only reliable method of testing the qualities required in those who aspire to serve the state. Its critics are equally certain that it proves nothing but a certain type of mental agility, or the ability

to cram the requisite amount of knowledge on a number of subjects which have little or no relevance to the duties which the candidate will have to perform. Unfortunately under the present dispensation the critics have been unable as yet to discover an alternative method of selection, which will not at the same time restore all the evils of patronage and jobbery which the examination system was devised to destroy.

But unfortunately also this system is itself not entirely free from defects which on a limited scale may have similar results. The report of the committee set up in 1854 to examine the organization of the Civil Service was forced to admit that so far as the administrative class was concerned, the examination system weighted the scales very heavily in favour of the candidate with academic and classical qualifications. Hence it is that "the administrative class which occupies all the controlling positions in the Home Civil Service consists to an overwhelming extent of the fortunate few who can manage to get to Oxford or Cambridge".[1]

This is particularly true of the Indian and Colonial Civil Service. We learn for instance that in the case of the I.C.S. the preponderating number of recruits year by year has come from one or other of these universities. We know too that at these establishments the curriculum favours the candidate with a bent for what are called the humanities, rather than the history or political economy which for administrators one would have thought to be the more useful acquisition. It is true, of course, that there has been some broadening of the basis of university education, but it is doubtful if the slight advance made is sufficient to justify the assertion that the older universities at least are not still a fairly close preserve for a privileged minority. If we go on to assume that the social background of that minority is by its nature bound to encourage a "what I have I hold" approach to the problem of colonial administration it will lead only to one conclusion, which will be that the examination method of entry within the limits of the educational system, as we know it, can only go so far to widen the basis of selection for our administrative

[1] Wm. A. Robson, *The Public Service*, a symposium.

officials. "The older generation of empire builders . . . held a firm faith that in dealing with native races, to have an administrative staff of officers and gentlemen was half the battle."[1] Quite so. No 'cads' need apply, in short. And can we be quite sure that this formula passed out of currency with the older generation? How many of our administrators are still imbued with the "Sanders of the River" mentality and outlook? How many of them would regard their self-imposed task of carrying the White Man's Burden as a sacred trust even when the time came to transfer it to native shoulders? We already know the answer to that and we know also its results in India and other areas of colonial administration. Yet, who can doubt that an 'enlightened' university curriculum is turning out quite a number of higher civil servants who in this particular sphere approach the task of 'ruling' the lesser breeds with a high sense of responsibility. Unfortunately, however, *esprit de corps* and an attitude of paternalism are often no more than thin disguises for an obstinate intention to go on ruling at all costs.

We have dealt up to the present only with those administrative civil servants who more obviously carry on the work of central government. But the outlook for good or ill is just as potent within the Social Service and Home Departments. The administration of the Public Health Services, social insurance, Public Assistance and the fiscal system call for qualities of imagination and vision which no examination system in the world can unassisted hope to reveal.

They demand not only a zealous application to administrative processes, but a due appreciation of the social ends to which those processes may lead. Otherwise, 'loyalty' in the narrow sense of the Civil Service code may lead not only to frustration and futility for the individual, but far more important, to highly undesirable social results for the community. It is useless to criticize the civil servant for being hidebound and caste-ridden if at the same time you refuse to define his function in terms of greater clarity. Policy-making, yes—but what kind of policy and on whose behalf? The civil servant,

[1] Leonard Barnes, *The Colonial Service*, a symposium.

like many scientists, may tell us that this is not his business. We shall hardly be expected to agree with him.

The Civil Service Commissioners have introduced another safeguard to ensure the maintenance of the right sort of standard for .the staffing of the administrative class. This is the *viva voce*, a hurdle which all candidates are required to get over after they have passed the written examination. It has been argued before by more than one Royal Commission that the introduction of this intimate type of test would be bound to offer scope for class prejudice. This has invariably been refuted by reference to the actual results but the refutation itself lacks impressiveness, since there are all too many cases on record of candidates who have deliberately trimmed their sails in the knowledge of what they thought to be the inevitable reactions of the examiners to social and political questions. The same problem arises in the case of the "present-day" paper in the written examination syllabus, a 'wrong' approach to which might conceivably make all the difference when it comes to getting through the eye of the administrative needle. It seems to come to this—that within the confines of a monopoly capitalism, which by its nature delimits the sphere of operation of its administrators and rigidly defines their function, the examination system is probably the best suited for its purpose.

Professor Laski has become convinced "that our methods of administration produce, above all at the apex of the departmental pyramid, a race of officials who have sacrificed experimentalism and audacity for soundness and the desire to be thought a 'safe' man".[1] To which profound truth it is only necessary to add that experimentalism may be of more than one kind and that we should be well advised to create the sort of social and economic framework for our Civil Service within which it can "experiment" to the benefit rather than detriment of the community. The result of overlooking that necessary precaution might well be to encourage the sort of administrative experimentation associated with the fascist state.

[1] Prof. H. Laski. A paper given to a conference on training for administration on 10th November, 1943.

CHAPTER 7

SCIENCE AND THE PROFESSIONS IN THE SERVICE

In this country most people are surprised to learn that it is possible for a man or woman to be not only a scientist or a person of professional standing but a civil servant into the bargain. We have become so habituated to the knowledge that science and the technical experts are still in the main the handmaids of big business and commercial enterprise that we do not expect to find these elements within the sphere of direct state employment. In actual fact, however, it would be difficult to find a single government department without its quota. They were there in fairly large numbers before the war, but the iron necessities of the war itself have brought many more of them into state service. Modern techniques in the direction of war production and the fighting services have as usual stimulated scientific research into a thousand and one processes. The greater degree of government control over those processes which war inevitably introduces has meant that much of the research has had to be carried out in state-controlled establishments. If after the war those controls are removed, then science and the professions will again be at the beck and call of the private capitalist. But before that time is reached the expert will have learned some valuable lessons through his association with the state apparatus. It is impossible to be a lawyer in the Estate Duty Office, a surveyor in the Valuation Office, an economist in the Ministry of Agriculture, a statistician in the Home Office, a sanitary officer in the Office of Works, or a draughtsman in the Air Ministry, without discovering the sort of relationship which exists between the administration and the system which upholds it. The frustration suffered by the scientist and technician through the misuse of their training and knowledge at the hands of private industry, which takes only what it wants for its own purpose and throws the rest away, is a matter of common knowledge.

It is only slightly mitigated, indeed it is on occasions increased, when the knowledge is placed at the disposal of a government department which has only a partial and temporary control of the ends towards which it is directed. Here again this question of loyalty crops up. At a social function not long before the war, the then chairman of a staff association which caters for the professional and technical workers in the Service expressed the view that the professional civil servant's first loyalty was to the state, the second to his profession and the third to the organization which represented his interests. To that sort of loose statement there is only one reply. If the interests of the state, profession and organization conflict, it can only be because the formula is again based upon too narrow an interpretation of the state. Widened to include every section of the community, the artificial division can no longer exist. In Soviet Russia, for instance, there can be no such thing as a scale of loyalties and a divided allegiance as between public service and scientific preoccupation. "*Everything* in the Soviet Union is in the hands of a state which fully recognizes the role of science in every aspect of modern life, in medicine no less than in war. . . . Scientists are an integral part of the leadership of the state. . . . Science in the Soviet Union belongs to the people."[1] In our own country the scientist and technician are not yet in that happy position, as witness their comparatively subordinate role in relation to departmental policy.

To illustrate this, let us quote from the report of a committee of enquiry into the Post Office set up in 1931. Commenting on a claim by the technical staff for a greater share in departmental administration, "the Committee thought that there should be no bar but that generally speaking the specialist tended to remain a specialist. Where, however, a member of the technical staff showed that he possessed administrative ability, he should be eligible for such a post." This report led to the appointment of a small number of technicians to administrative posts and a consequent improvement in the quality and direction of departmental policy. The Institution of Professional Civil Servants had already raised the same

[1] Roscoe Clark, "Soviet Medical Science", *Science in Soviet Russia.*

question in evidence before the Tomlin Commission in 1929, when it went somewhat further by seeking for the professional and technical officer the right of direct access to the Minister, or as an alternative the appointment of technical consultants to a departmental board or committee. Both of these proposals were rejected by the Commission as tending "to undermine the authority of the Permanent Secretary, who may take advice from anyone qualified to give it, but may not delegate his ultimate responsibility for advising the responsible Minister on matters affecting the policy of his department".

Only quite recently, during the course of the present war, the Association of Scientific Workers has put up a strong plea for the appointment of research workers and technicians to Joint Production Committees in aircraft factories and elsewhere, but the suggestion was no more sympathetically received. One is forced therefore to the conclusion that in its attitude towards the scientist and technician, the state is not very far removed from the private industrialist. It could scarcely be otherwise since "the conscious utilization of science by the state, though to a certain extent implicit in establishments such as the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research is foreign to the western democracies".[1] And yet there is an enormous amount of important research in progress throughout the different branches of the Service. We can get some idea of its extent and scope by glancing at the last pre-war report of the National Physical Laboratory issued in 1937. Here is a list of some of the principal activities undertaken during that year by scientists employed in the public service:

Research on the effects of glare and street lighting.
Investigation of fatigue failure of metals.
Measurement of sound and noise.
Architectural acoustics, radio research, lubrication, research and taximeter testing.
Wind pressure and heat transmission.
Production of pure iron; research on alloys.
Stability and control of aircraft and the behaviour of ships in rough water.

[1] Prof. J. D. Bernal, "Technology in the Soviet Union", *Science in Soviet Russia.*

The list is impressive. It its range it covers a vast area of investigation into phenomena which have a direct social significance—housing, public health, civil aviation, transport and shipping, and the heavy industries are all involved, and given a system in which "everything was in the hands of the state" (defined as the whole of the people), the results of so much investigation would normally lead to some extremely desirable social results.

Let us see what in fact happens: again I quote from the Report. It refers to "the assistance which the Laboratory is in a position to give to industrial firms and research organizations by the investigations of problems which arise in the application of scientific research to practical aspects of development and manufacture". It goes on to assert that "to be of the greatest assistance in this work, the staff must have a *full realisation* [my italics] of the importance of the results obtained and that to this end it would be advantageous for members of the staff to work in the laboratories of private firms and *vice versa*". We find later on in the report that the laboratory gives advice to private concerns, and without charge, on special problems arising in industry and lends out on the same terms drawings of apparatus for research and investigation. During 1937, papers on the electrical properties of resins were read by members of the laboratory staff to representatives of the Plastics Group of the Society of the Chemicals Industry and the Oil and Colour Chemists' Association. (Plastics, recollect, is the coming industry.) The cost of calibration plant rendered necessary by the increased demands of modern engines was defrayed and the plant developed jointly by the Air Ministry, the Society of British Aircraft Constructors and the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders.

Research work on ebonite was carried out in conjunction with the British Rubber Manufacturers on behalf of the British Electrical and Allied Industries Research Association. Important experiments were also conducted *on behalf of* the Dry Cleaning Industry. All this represents a mass of investigation into processes the end results of which are bound to be of incalculable social significance. The research has been carried out in a government establishment by qualified civil servants

on behalf of, or in conjunction with, private interests over which in normal peace-time circumstances the state has exercised only a nominal control. Take one further example: the same laboratory engaged during the year under review in research connected with the manufacture of synthetic rubber. It has been stated recently, and so far as the writer is aware the statement has not been repudiated, that certain Anglo-American cartels had prevented the exploitation of synthetic rubber in this country. There are too many similar cases on record for this not to be near enough in accordance with the facts. But assuming only the bare possibility of its truth, it is sufficient to illustrate the effect which the irresponsible decisions of private monopolies, concerned only with profit, could have on the trend of research in government laboratories.

To push the point still further. At the thirty-third general meeting of the Bristol Aeroplane Co., Ltd., the chairman announced that "the government had invited the company to design the large transport aircraft which the company had recommended for use on the transatlantic air service—a project which would involve the company's aircraft division in extensive research and development". Now turn again to the report of the National Physical Laboratory and note that another job upon which it has been engaged has involved research into the stability and control of aircraft. It is logical to assume surely that the results of this research will be made available to the Bristol Aeroplane Company and to all the other concerns which already are making plans to exploit the commercial possibilities of post-war civil aviation, and that they will be accepted or rejected solely by reference to those possibilities. It is practically impossible in the light of so much factual evidence to escape the conclusion now becoming almost monotonous that even on its scientific side the Civil Service is very much the servant, not of the public, but of "the system". That will be a very disturbing reflection for scientists and professional men who have thought to escape the personal dilemma created by the abuse of their knowledge and experience at the hands of private enterprise, by transferring them to the service of the state. But if it persuades them to

come away from the position of scientific detachment so often taken up by them and to enlarge the scope of their research to include also the social sciences there will be a net gain arising out of their disillusionment.

Another important direction in which the state has identified itself with the interests of British industry is in the creation of a number of Research Associations with the aim of "demonstrating to industrialists the value of applied research and preventing the repetition of the state of affairs in 1914, when they were caught napping by the more scientific industry of the Germans".[1] The associations cover an enormous field of scientific research applied to a vast range of industries and are heavily subsidized by the government. And yet the total amount expended out of the public purse is ridiculously inadequate for the real needs of a highly industrialized economy. In the year to 31st March, 1931, for instance, we learn that the cost to the state of all the work undertaken by the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research amounted to no more than £600,000. For this relatively insignificant expenditure the department had engaged in fruitful research into such socially indispensable industries as coal; building and roads; foodstuffs; chemicals and timber. Much of it, as we have seen from the declared aims of the research associations, was for the direct benefit of private enterprise in its competition with other countries for pride of place in the world's markets.

If we go on to look at the amounts expended by the government during the same year on scientific research more directly related to the work of the various state departments, we arrive at some equally revealing results. Of a total amounting to £3,280,000, almost exactly one-half was devoted to the fighting services. The next biggest single item was for agriculture and forestry, which absorbed £545,000. Medical research and the Ministry of Health accounted for £200,000; the Office of Works £180,000; Post Office £88,000; Transport £70,000; Mines £2,000; the Colonial Services £56,000; and Development £121,000.

[1] Prof. J. D. Bernal, *The Social Functions of Science.*

The figures are significant as showing in a peace-time year the disproportionate amount of state-controlled scientific research devoted to the development of war technique compared with the corresponding amount applied to purely industrial processes. Related to what has already been said as to the subordinate role adopted by the state in its association with private industry, one gets a very unattractive picture of the part played by the Civil Service in the development of science in its more socially beneficial aspects. We contrast it again with the position in the Soviet Union, where the scientist is an integral part of the state apparatus, where, in fact, research and investigation into productive processes is the central feature of government itself, since its one aim is the progressive improvement of standards of life and not the restriction of production in the interests of private profit. One instance alone will suffice to illustrate the difference between the two attitudes. The coal output in the Soviet Union was increased from 29 million tons in 1913 to 137 million in 1937. This result was due in the main to the intensive research carried on by geologists who discovered new coalfields and technicians who expanded the resources of those already in production. It could never have happened under a system in which the initiative rested in the hands of a privately controlled coal industry depending upon the scientific resources of the state department only to an extent necessary to maintain the industry at a productive level far below its maximum potential. As recently as November 1943 we read of striking developments taking place in connection with automatic systems of central heating designed for incorporation in post-war housing schemes. The experimental work is being carried out in a specially constructed establishment by scientists employed in the Office of Works. At some stage or another decisions will have to be taken as to the further development of this process. Will it be handed over as a free gift to the speculative builder or will this valuable piece of scientific research, conducted under the direct auspices of the state, be linked up with equally valuable work within the sphere of post-war planning and the whole made available to the general community?

That as we know will depend upon the degree of control to be exercised by the state over the operations of monopoly capitalism after the war. What we now see, and it is in no way better exemplified than within the sphere of departmental scientific research, is not so much control by the state over these operations as its growing identification with them. Is it to be wondered therefore that scientists in the Civil Service are becoming increasingly angered with the restrictions imposed upon the full utilization of their services, or that they are seeking larger opportunities to influence, by administrative action, the policies of the departments in which they are employed and of the central government itself? They see in the Soviet Union the scientist imbued with a full sense of social responsibility, playing a major part in the building and protection of a planned economy, and they know of no reason why their own creative aspirations should be forced to serve the needs of a completely unscientific and unplanned productive system. In taking up this attitude they must be encouraged and supported by the rest of the Civil Service and by the general public.

Apart from the scientists there are other professional and technical elements in the Civil Service with a very close interest in this problem. In any sort of economy one would have thought it impossible to overestimate for instance the importance of accurate and complete statistics. But the Government's record in this respect is lamentable beyond words. For years before the war we learn that no records of production, raw materials, profits, etc., were available. There was not even a reliable estimate of the national income. Industries were variously classified by the Ministry of Labour, the Census of Production Office and the Registrar-General, and there was little or no attempt at co-ordination.

Statisticians, employed as they were and are still only in certain departments, remained very much in the dark as to the use to which their figures were put, and much of the social benefit of their labours was inevitably lost. The inadequacy of the statistical machinery at the service of the state was demonstrated very clearly during the hearing of a claim made to the Arbitration Court for an increase in the war bonus paid to

civil servants. It was found impossible from official records to ascertain the true position with regard to the comparative payment of war bonus to different categories of employees outside the Civil Service, and the unions themselves were forced to make an independent investigation in order to arrive at the facts. For this they were actually complimented in open court by Treasury officials who appeared in no way abashed by the fact that the staff side were in effect doing their own work for them.

Examples of this sort could be multiplied almost to infinity to illustrate the dilemma in which the professional man in the Service is bound to find himself under the existing dispensation.

CHAPTER 8

THE SERVICE TRADE UNIONS

In the year 1890 the clerks employed on a temporary footing in a certain government department considered that the conditions of their service justified a collective approach to their departmental chief. Accordingly, they forwarded a petition in which they "humbly prayed" that he would see fit to grant some improvement in their rates of pay, which at that time rose from 5s. per week to a dizzy maximum of £2. The official reply to this piece of daring expressed surprise that such a petition should have been addressed to the department by persons who were "not even civil servants" and went on to suggest that the request for an increase in pay was as improper as the tone of the petition in which it was preferred. It concluded by suggesting that if they were dissatisfied with the wages paid to them it was open to them to seek employment elsewhere—and that was that.

Since that time the employees of the state have made considerable strides in collective action and the general attitude which they adopt today in their negotiations with the official side on pay and conditions could be regarded as neither prayerful nor humble. In other words, they have built up a trade union movement which, in spite of certain defects with which we shall deal later, will bear comparison with industrial unionism in most essentials. Today there are approximately 200 separate unions catering for different sections of the Service. That is, on occasion, as much a cause for despair as for self-congratulation, and attempts are already being made to reduce the number drastically—but it does serve to reveal the completeness with which civil servants have accepted the principle of collective action. The cap-in-hand mentality is in fact as dead as the graft and corruption which equally disfigured the Service during the early phases of its evolution. Considerations of space preclude any detailed enumeration of

these unions, many of which represent only a bare handful of members, and we shall confine ourselves to the larger and more important of them. The postal group is obviously in the forefront with a record of trade unionism which links them with the early pioneer struggles of the industrial unions. The Union of Postal Workers with a 1940 membership of well over 130,000 is the largest unit in that group. It caters for the manipulative grades in the Post Office, many of whom have a direct affinity with analogous classes of workers outside the Service. Then there are the Post Office Engineering Union with something like 40,000, the Post Office Controlling Officers' Association covering the indoor supervisory grades, and five other associations catering for similar grades linked with it in a Federation of Post Office Supervising Officers. All the other manipulative grades outside the Post Office field are organized in the Government Minor and Manipulative Grades' Association. It has a miscellaneous membership ranging from messengers, cleaners and park-keepers to members of the coastguard service, preventive men employed in the Customs and Excise Department, instructors in Ministry of Labour Training Centres, and custodians of ancient monuments.

Before we come to the clerical organizations, a word of explanation is necessary. We have already seen that the general structure of the Service provides for a number of common classes in a graded hierarchy with common salary scales and conditions. These are described as Treasury classes, because the scales and conditions are not determined by reference to the department in which the individual civil servant happens to be employed. There are exceptions, however, to this general rule. In certain departments the work has been regarded as unsuitable for performance by officers drawn from the Treasury classes, and in these cases special departmental classes have been created. It will be readily appreciated that the existence of these separate classes has introduced an additional complication into the already difficult task of organizing the clerical workers of the Service within appropriate unions. Here is the method whereby the difficulty has been partially overcome. The Civil Service Clerical Association

caters for the whole of the Treasury clerical classes. Its membership—over 80,000 in 1940—has almost doubled during the war, owing to the creation of new departments, the expansion of existing departments and the consequent influx of "temporaries". In addition to the Treasury classes it also includes in its membership the departmental classes employed in the War Office, Admiralty, Air Ministry, Assistance Board and a few other departments.

It is by far the largest of the clerical unions.

The clerical workers in the Inland Revenue are in a departmental class and over 27,000 are organized in the Inland Revenue Staff Federation.

Though a Federation in name, this organization is centrally controlled and speaks for the whole of the clerical personnel employed in the offices of Inspectors and Collectors of Taxes and in the Valuation Branch. (The technical officers in the Income Tax service are separately organized.) The staffs of the Employment Exchanges, also a departmental class, are organized in the Ministry of Labour Staff Association, the membership of which has increased since 1940 from 11,000 to 17,000. The managerial and other higher-grade staff are members of the Association of Officers of the Ministry of Labour. There has been some overlapping between the two organizations and a loose form of federation is in process of negotiation.[1]

The County Court Officers' Association, which is self-descriptive, has a membership of 1,500.

The C.S.C.A., I.R.S.F., M.L.S.A. and C.C.O.A. are grouped together in the Civil Service Alliance, a federal body with no authority to determine the policy of its constituents but acting as a clearing-house for matters of common interest to all four. An amalgamation of these four bodies into one organization comprising the whole of the clerical workers in the Service has been energetically advocated from time to time. The war, however, bringing with it an all-round increase of membership, the maintenance of which must depend on all sorts of incalculable factors, has made it difficult at the moment to

[1] This federation is now in being.

continue that campaign. Circumstances will probably bring this objective appreciably nearer and meanwhile the Alliance is regarded as the next best thing.

Within the field of indirect taxation the officers of Customs and Excise have their own organization, the C. & E. Federation with upwards of 5,000 members. Then we come to the executive class, occupying, as we have seen, a buffer-state position between clerical and administrative. Their numbers too have doubled since 1940, and the membership of the Society of Civil Servants which caters for them is now in the neighbourhood of 18,000.

Finally, we have the Institution of Professional Civil Servants. The position of the professional and scientific and technical classes in the Service has already been reviewed at some length and the problem of representing their interests with any sort of adequacy will have been appreciated.

The Institution is a loosely knit body and its constituents, of which there are at the moment well over 100, have considerable autonomy within their own field. Some of them have an almost microscopic membership. The total membership covered by the Institution reaches a figure of over 23,000. In bringing them together within an organization which enables them to give collective expression to the professional and scientific point of view the I.P.C.S. has had a hard struggle, and problems of co-ordination and grouping are still a major preoccupation.

In this enumeration we have covered the larger part of the area of state employment. We ought now to see whether the form of trade union organization is, by reference to the nature of that employment, the best suited for its purpose. What is that purpose? The following, taken from the printed constitution of one of the aforementioned organizations, is fairly typical of the rest: "To protect and promote the interests of its members, to regulate the conditions of their employment and the relations between them and their employers and to provide and maintain such services as may be approved from time to time." There are variations on this theme, of course. The Society of Civil Servants, for instance, adds the further

object of "protecting the professional status of the Civil Service". But broadly speaking, it can be said that these objects are common to most of the Service unions.

The Union of Post Office Workers is a notable exception. This organization puts in the forefront of its objects "the organization of Post Office Workers into a comprehensive industrial union, with a view to the Service being ultimately conducted and managed as a National Guild".

Apart from this the U.P.W. subscribes to the same objects which govern most of the other Service unions.

It will be of some interest to see how these objects compare with those laid down for some of the industrial unions. The narrow definition was formulated by Sydney and Beatrice Webb, in the *History of Trade Unionism.*

In their view a trade union was "a continuous association of wage earners for the purpose of maintaining and improving the conditions of their working lives", a formula to which the objects of the Service unions can truly be said to conform. But individual industrial unions have added to this generally accepted formula other objects which very considerably transcend the scope of that definition. The A.E.U., for instance, prefaces a long list of objects with "the control of industry in the interests of the community".

The Transport and General Workers' Union starts off with "the regulation of the relations between workmen and employers and between workmen and workmen", but includes as one of the further objects of the union, "the extension of co-operative production and distribution".

The Durham Miners' Association rounds off its list with "the abolition of capitalism and the substitution of the common ownership and control of the means of livelihood".

Finally, in a report of a trade union committee, set up in 1921, and subsequently endorsed by the T.U.C., the aims and objects of trade unions are summarized under two headings, as

1. Securing for wage earners the best possible conditions under the existing system:

and

2. Entirely changing the industrial system by establishing in industry and society such democratic conditions and relations as will satisfy the legitimate aspirations of the working class.

Here, under the second of these two headings, you have an objective only possible of attainment by political action of some kind or another. Its inclusion in the declared aims and objects of industrial trade unionism is a tacit admission, therefore, that "the protection and promotion of the interests of the industrial worker" cannot in the final analysis be secured by methods of collective negotiation within the existing system.

This admission is not even implied in the constitutions of most of the Civil Service unions, and it will be useful to remember that when we come later to look at the position of the state employee in relation to civil liberty. Many attempts have been made to get the objects of specific unions re-defined to allow things to be done which on a narrow interpretation seemed to be ruled out. During the Spanish Civil War, for instance, certain members of more than one organization argued that the use of general funds for the purpose of making contributions towards the relief of distress caused by fascist aggression came clearly within the four walls of the constitution. How, it was said, could you expect to protect the interests of your members if you failed to support in some tangible way every movement and organization which was actively engaged in the struggle to maintain democratic institutions? Attention was drawn to the position of the French Civil Service, many of whose leaders had played a prominent part in the *Front Populaire* and the fate which had overtaken the unions of the public employees when the Blum government was destroyed. The feeling engendered by these attempts to broaden the constitution became so intense that in the case of one union an injunction to restrain it from taking the action suggested was sought, and as a result the subscription of funds to aid the Spanish people was put by this and some

other Service unions on a purely voluntary basis. As some indication, however, of the extent to which the Service unions are coming to a realization that the days of their isolation from the body politic are numbered, we may cite only two instances. In May, 1939, the Annual Conference of the Inland Revenue Staff Federation endorsed with enthusiasm and without a single dissentient a resolution which "affirmed its belief in democracy as the only basis of society upon which social and economic progress could be made". It declared its intention "to defend that principle, particularly within its own sphere of organization and to fight for the preservation of the freedom of association which in its view was the sole guarantee of the preservation and improvement of wage standards and conditions of service". The Civil Service Clerical Association went a lot further than this when, in 1941, it endorsed a nine-point manifesto, which included a welcome for the Anglo-Soviet Treaty, a reconstitution of the Government regardless of party considerations, the removal of the ban (which then existed) on the *Daily Worker*, the establishment of Joint Production Committees, and an early declaration of British war aims.

The recent action of the U.P.W. in connection with the Trades Disputes Act will be discussed later. What we now seek to show is that even Civil Service unions with a long tradition of respectability and 'constitutionalism' are being forced, by the impact of world events, to reinterpret their aims and objects and to see them in the context of larger and more directly political issues.

There is more reality in this attitude than in one which suggests that "the staff associations should confine themselves as far as possible to matters of purely professional concern and that they should approximate more to the outside professional society than to the industrial trade union". The same writer wrote also that "the aim should be to leave to the individual civil servant the performance of his own political duties as a citizen and for the association to participate in political activity as little as possible".[1] We shall not be surprised after

[1] E. M. Gladden, *Civil Service Staff Relationships*.

that to find that he agrees with the present limitations placed upon the political rights of civil servants. Fortunately, there is little danger that the Service unions will accept this view of their status and function. It is one which, if adopted, would bring them dangerously near to the position of the company or house unions which have already endangered true trade unionism in other fields.

In the picture of trade union organization within the Service it will be difficult for the reader to trace any consistent pattern. It would be convenient, no doubt, if one could regard the Civil Service as a more or less self-contained industry and on this basis to attempt to organize its members within one big union. That, however, is not in present circumstances as easy as it may sound. Outside the Service, industrial unionism has been an ideal never capable of absolute realization. The annual report of the T.U.C. in 1924 described the three types of organization existing within the trade union movement, as:

1. Craft unionism, in which, irrespective of industry, the workers are grouped according to their craft identity.
2. Industrial unionism where the whole of the workers skilled or unskilled and irrespective of the craft followed, are grouped in accordance with the industry in which for the time being they may happen to be enployed, and
3. General unionism, which brings a miscellany of workers together irrespective of craft, industry or occupation.

The Webbs, whose knowledge of the trade union movement was, as we know, profound, saw the solution in terms of *ad hoc* arrangements combining features of all three forms of organization.

G. D. H. Cole, on the other hand, came down very heavily on the side of the industrial union. He advanced two main reasons. The first was, that against any mass formation of capitalism it was necessary to oppose an equally strong formation of labour. He conceded that this argument was only valid on the assumption that trade unionism was to be

regarded as a class movement based on the class struggle. His second argument was that if the union had as its aim something more than the protection of its members within the existing system—if, in fact, it aimed at self-government in industry, then it must obviously be industrial in structure.

All these conflicting views were discussed by the 1927 Congress of the T.U.C. on a resolution which advocated a reduction of the number of unions to the absolute minimum and the organization of all workers on an industrial basis.

The discussion turned on the divergence of view expressed by different unions as to the line of demarcation of a particular industry. The principal determining factors advanced were:

1. The commodity produced *or the service rendered* [my italics].
2. The tool operated.
3. The employer or group of employers.

The Congress finally decided that, in view of the impossibility of defining the boundaries of industry, it would be impracticable to formulate a scheme of industrial organization which could be made to apply to all industries.

This may seem something of a digression but it has some importance when we come to consider the general principles (if we can discover any) which underlie Civil Service trade union organization. It is clear that there can be no very close analogy between the Service and the general body of industry. The State, on its non-industrial side, is not directly concerned with production. Its employees do not therefore, in any strict sense, operate a tool, and having regard to an enormously wide variation of function it would be difficult to argue that they followed any clearly recognized craft. It is true that they have one employer, the state itself, and one big union covering the whole Service field would appear therefore to have some logical justification. The delegation of authority by the Treasury to individual departments, however, and the lack of any real interchangeability of staff between them has, as we have seen in the cases of such organizations as the Postal Unions, the Inland Revenue Staff Federation, the Customs and

Excise Federation and the Ministry of Labour Staff Association, had the effect of interrupting that tendency. It could, of course, be argued that although the Civil Service is not a commodity-producing entity it does most certainly "render a service" and that this factor, common to every state employee, points again in the obvious direction of 'industrial' organization. But as we have seen, trade union organization is as little able to proceed by pure logic as any other organic institution, and, while working towards a form which in the meaning of G. D. H. Cole's words will enable a mass formation of workers to confront a mass formation of employers (in this case the government departments), it will be necessary for some time to come to adapt existing forms to constantly changing needs. At present the structure of Service unionism is broadly horizontal in character, the strips corresponding to the main classes to be found within the Service hierarchy, e.g. the minor and manipulative, clerical, executive and professional and technical, with exceptions in the case of the separately organized departmental classes previously referred to. It is clear, of course, that if the post-war reconstruction of the Civil Service brings with it a reduction or merging of classes, the horizontal strips will need to be widened. The abolition of departmentalism would have the same effect, and we should be brought appreciably nearer to the creation of larger units of trade union organization. One final factor which would hasten that objective is the greater unity of interests which a change of the social and economic environment would inevitably produce within the area of state employment. The present concern with status arises, as we have seen, from a certain sense of frustration. That, surely, will tend to diminish when the Civil Service is linked with what we at present call the outside world in a common effort for the achievement of common aims.

Meanwhile, Service trade unionism can already show some remarkable achievements within the narrower sphere of purely economic improvement.

It is not possible within the scope of this book to give the history of those achievements. They have brought with them

a progressive improvement in the standards of remuneration of every grade and class and conferred upon the unions a prestige and a status which neither the Treasury nor heads of departments can afford to ignore. A technique of negotiation has been perfected which permits the discussion of wage claims and conditions at every level and with minimum delay. Within these spheres and the limits imposed by the multi-tiered structure of the Service itself, the Civil Service trade union movement has fully justified itself. The fight for recognition has been won and in this the Service unions have long since blazed a trail which other black-coat organizations, such as the Guild of Insurance Officials and the Bank Officers' Guild, have far more recently begun to follow. Their big test is still, however, to come. It lies in the extent to which they can influence the further development of the Civil Service as an instrument of social change, and in the process eliminate sectionalism and vested interest from their own ranks. Moreover, just as the industrial unions are being forced, by the stark facts of a war for the survival of the democratic idea, to take on new responsibilities in order to stimulate production for its successful prosecution, so in a similar way the Service unions are being obliged to enlarge the scope of their normal functions and to claim a greater share of responsibility for the day-to-day work of the departments. In the next chapter we shall see how these new tasks are being accomplished.

CHAPTER 9

WHITLEYISM

THE Service trade unions are not the only machinery at the disposal of civil servants for the ventilation of grievances and the settlement of disputes. Whitleyism, at one time almost moribund, is, within its own special sphere and through the impact which the war has had upon the day-to-day work of the state departments, entering upon a new lease of life.

Outside the Service it is practically a dead letter; which makes it all the more interesting to recall that the Whitley system owed its existence to the industrial unrest, particularly on Clydeside, which characterized the later stages of the war of 1914–18. The government, with an eye to the post-war future, appointed a committee in 1917 under the chairmanship of J. H. Whitley, then Speaker of the House of Commons, to examine ways and means of avoiding industrial disputes.

In the final paragraph of the report made by this committee to Lloyd George, the hope was expressed "that representative men in each industry with pride in their calling and care for its place as a contributor to the national well-being, will come together in the manner here suggested and apply themselves to promoting industrial harmony and efficiency and removing the obstacles that have hitherto stood in the way". The report was adopted by the government, and trades unions and employers in each industry were recommended to set up Whitley Councils as instruments of trade union negotiation. But for some inexplicable reason the Civil Service was not included within the scope of this recommendation and the Service unions had a hard fight to persuade the government to extend the facilities provided by the Whitley machinery to the employees of the state.

This reluctance was eventually overcome and a National Whitley Council for the Civil Service was created in order "to secure the greatest measure of co-operation between the state

in its capacity of employer and the general body of civil servants, in matters affecting the Civil Service, with a view to increased efficiency in the Public Service, combined with the wellbeing of those employed . . . and generally to bring together the experience and different points of view of representatives of the Civil Service."

In greater detail the whole aim and purpose of Whitleyism can be said to be:

1. To provide the best means for utilizing the ideas and experience of the staff.
2. To secure for the staff a greater share in and responsibility for the determination and observance of conditions under which their duties are carried out. and
3. To determine the general principles of service, e.g. recruitment, tenure, promotion, remuneration, etc.

In practice, the last of these objects is confined to matters in which there is a common interest and in which therefore action by specific unions would be inappropriate. It is in relation to the first two of these aims that there have been the biggest developments of the Whitley system, particularly during the present war. The National Whitley Council is a joint body upon which the staff and official sides are equally represented. The official-side representatives are normally heads of departments or senior officials. They are therefore administrative civil servants separated from the staff side only by virtue of their 'policy-making' function; nevertheless they sit on the other side of the table and represent the interests of the state in its capacity as employer. The appointing bodies to the staff side are the Service unions, or in some cases groups of unions. The clerical representation for instance is vested in the Civil Service Alliance which speaks, or should speak, with one voice on behalf of all the clerical organizations which comprise it. A tradition has grown up whereby most of the staff-side members are full-time officers of the Service unions. The arguments in favour of this arrangement proceed on the

assumption that since many of the decisions taken by the National Whitley Council will have to be implemented through the machinery of the unions, it is essential that general secretaries and other officers should be aware of those decisions. The time factor is also introduced as an additional reason for making National Whitley a more or less close preserve.

E. M. Gladden, previously quoted, has drawn attention to what he calls the dangers of professionalism inherent in this tendency. He speaks of "the artificial creation of objectives and a tendency towards dictatorship on the part of full-time officers in relation to a membership of serving civil servants". There is more than a grain of truth in that, as the present writer has had a very good opportunity to observe, but it represents a tendency which will be corrected, not by deprofessionalizing the Service unions, but by supplying certain correctives. That should be done, where the national staff side is concerned, by restricting the number of seats held by full-time officers and by taking steps to see that union executives keep a more watchful eye on the proceedings at National Whitley levels. The Joint Council meets at infrequent intervals. The staff side nowadays is in almost constant session. The range of its activity is immense and covers practically everything which can affect the life of a civil servant, from the war bonus issue in which almost the whole of the Service is involved, to the conditions of employment of part-time women cleaners.

In addition to the National Council every separate government department is authorized to set up its own Departmental Whitley Council. The functions and structure of these Councils are practically the same as those prescribed for the national body except of course that their area of operation is confined to the affairs of the department concerned.

The composition of the staff side of a Departmental Council will also be determined by the grades and classes employed within the department, and the unions catering for them. Strangely enough these Councils owe no allegiance to the National Whitley Council, the staff-side members of which take their instructions direct from constituent unions. They are regarded as of purely domestic significance, though as will

be seen later, they can be made to become an increasingly important part of Whitleyism.

The reluctance of the government to introduce the Whitley system into the Civil Service has already been observed. It would be natural to assume therefore that the general attitude of the official side would hardly be one of excessive cordiality. There would be variations of course since the progressively minded are to be found within all walks of life and even government departments are no exception to that rule. In the long run, however, it would be no injustice to assert that in most departments and on the national body itself there was, until the beginning of the war, no marked inclination on the part of the official side "to co-operate with the staff with a view to increased efficiency, etc." Whitley was regarded as a necessary evil. Joint meetings were a formality; their purpose, to rubber-stamp decisions which in any case would for the most part have been implemented by administrative action. The staff side served the quite useful purpose of passing on these decisions to its constituents and of giving to them a semblance of joint agreement.

From time to time, attempts were made to make Whitley work as in accordance with its own constitution it was intended to, but when the main preoccupation of the staff lay rather in the direction of improvements in pay and conditions and these could be engineered more successfully through the machinery of the unions, there was very little disposition to put the Whitley house in order.

The war has ended that phase. New legislation, changes of procedure, the growth of departmental function, and a host of new regulations have created the necessity for a clearing-house, and as a result National Whitley is humming with activity. In this capacity it has become an indispensable instrument of Treasury policy, for the departmental application of which the goodwill of the staff is a paramount necessity. Normal methods of staffing have been set aside. Every process has been examined with a view to simplification. Whole staffs have found themselves evacuated to safe areas. Fireguard duties have had to be adapted to the special circumstances of

government offices housed in different types of building. These are only a few of the hundred and one matters upon which joint agreement has been sought. The Service organizations in common with the industrial unions have made big sacrifices of rights which it has taken them fifty years to secure. National Whitley is the repository for the agreements, signed or unsigned, which offer a guarantee that those rights will one day be restored.

It is within the sphere of Departmental Whitley activity, however, that the most significant developments have taken place. It has been an uphill and difficult task to persuade official-side representatives of the benefits to be obtained by taking the staff into their confidence and establishing a basis for closer co-operation to ensure the smooth working of departments in unique and rapidly changing conditions. The only fight comparable with it is that of the industrial unions to establish the principle of joint production machinery and to obtain full recognition for shop stewards' committees. In both cases it has been a struggle in which it has been necessary to overcome not only the inertia and exclusiveness of administrative heads and managements, but to persuade the union membership that this new form of activity was strictly in accordance with the declared aims and objects of trade unionism. This has not been easy. Many of those who sought to force Whitley to play the part for which it was designed have been accused, by those for whom trade union membership is only a form of insurance, of neglecting their legitimate economic interests. It was no part of their job it was said to help the departments to run the show. They should stick to their last and to mix the metaphor not go whoring after strange trade union gods.

In the long run these arguments came from those sections of the membership who had been equally vocal in their denunciation of the activities of those who had striven for a greater degree of political consciousness within the Service unions. Now that the political lesson had been driven home by the impact of a war, the true nature of which even in its fifth year was not yet entirely appreciated, there was still an

uncomfortable number of Civil Service trade unionists who thought that its conduct in terms of departmental activity could be left entirely to the official side. It was not easy to persuade them otherwise, particularly since the unions themselves were not always appreciative of the enormous advantages to be gained from operating the Whitley system to the last dot and comma of its constitution. It is understandable, too, that there would be some union officials who, having won their laurels and earned their rewards, psychological and otherwise, within the sphere of normal Civil Service negotiation, could hardly be expected to enthuse over an innovation which transferred a considerable amount of emphasis to the serving civil servant. There was a disinclination in some quarters, therefore, to challenge official-side conceptions of Whitley function as a merely endorsing body, to brush the dust and cobwebs from the machinery and to gear it to the needs of a people's war. But a big start has been made and in the process no legitimate economic interests have been sabotaged. In two departments alone, the gains from joint official and staff-side co-operation have been manifest in the considerable improvement of technique, the elimination of unessential work and a greater understanding between the civil servant and the public.

The case of the Inland Revenue Department illustrates to the full the advances made and the length of the road still to be travelled. Here is a government department with a very delicate and difficult function to perform. Until recently it has been endeavouring to apply a fiscal code which, in essentials, had not radically changed since it was introduced during the French wars. It was cluttered up with such a paraphernalia of commissioners, assessors, inspectors and collectors, and a host of archaic rules and regulations that the whole process of the assessment and collection of income tax was both frightening and wonderful to behold. Every Finance Act unloaded another set of instructions upon tax officials who were drowning under an already vast accumulation.

The taxpayer was in a state of continued bewilderment; in ignorance as to the basis upon which he was assessed and the

particular functionary from whom he should seek enlightenment, while between department and taxpayer there developed a mutual suspicion which the methods employed by the former could do nothing to destroy. That was practically the position at the outbreak of war when the startling increase in the number of taxpayers, particularly within the manual wage-earning community, faced the Revenue Department with a crucial situation. Speedy adaptation became necessary. But it is difficult to adapt a peace-time fiscal system devised for the balancing of budgets to a situation in which the one aim and purpose of taxation is to reduce the purchasing power of the community as speedily, effectively and painlessly as possible, particularly when more than eight millions of them have never paid tax before.

The difficulty is obviously increased when, at the same time, your experienced personnel has been depleted by transfer to the fighting forces and its place taken by temporary staff of any age between 16 and 60 and with varying degrees of inexperience. In parenthesis, the Civil Service had lost over 76,000 of its non-industrial established officers up to the end of 1942. There was within the Revenue Department therefore a fruitful field for initiative and innovation. Those qualities the staff themselves went out of their way to supply. They began with a request for a detailed examination of every single process and the introduction of every possible relaxation of existing methods. They advocated the use of broadcasting as the best means of acquainting the public with their responsibilities under the tax deduction scheme, which had been devised to simplify the accounting side of income tax by placing the onus for the deduction of tax and remission to the collector upon the employer. The General Secretary of the Inland Revenue Staff Federation was in fact obliged to take on this responsibility while the department was trying to decide whether the fiscal system could stand the strain of such a modern publicity medium as the wireless.

This one might describe as the agitational phase. It at least created a stir and persuaded both press and public that the rank-and-file workers in the Taxes Service were more than

willing, even at the expense of trade-union orthodoxy, to increase to the maximum their contribution to the war effort. Their union had already created an Advisory Bureau and placed its services unreservedly at the disposal of the T.U.C. and its constituents with the object of making things as easy as possible for the new army of taxpayers unversed in the ways of tax assessing and collecting. Then, at a later stage, the discovery was made that, apart from the effect upon the department of this abnormal growth in the number of inexperienced taxpayers, and their handling by almost equally inexperienced staff, there was the infinitely greater problem of the direct effect of the existing income-tax code upon production and morale. Millions of workers were suffering heavy deductions of tax calculated by reference to wages which had long since passed to the butcher, baker and landlord. Moreover, however wild the fluctuation of the weekly wage, the tax remained constant at this sometimes very high figure. The staff through the appropriate Whitley Committees felt that it was incumbent upon them to attempt a solution of this problem, and they went into almost permanent session to find one. The results of their labours were printed in a booklet which contained three or four variants on the theme of "pay-as-you-earn".

None of them were foolproof. All of them were capable of improvement, but they were the first by no means faint intimations of the fully worked-out scheme which the Chancellor of the Exchequer subsequently presented to the country, and as such, they created something of a furore. Somewhat daringly, the staff side, not satisfied that Whitley as then interpreted by the official side offered a genuine medium for the full and frank discussions of these new methods of taxation, gave them some wider publicity.

This drew upon them the stern rebuke of the late Chancellor, Sir Kingsley Wood, who in reply to a question put to him in the House of Commons asserted roundly that "the Whitley system provided all that was necessary to enable the staff to place its experience and knowledge at the disposal of the Department". So much is public property. What is more important in this present recital is the improvement to which

it led in the relations existing between staff and official sides. Official committees to review work processes were set up and on most of them a member of the staff (though not in a representative capacity) was appointed. The branch Whitley Committees acted as a clearing-house for every proposal made and over a thousand were received from members of the staff themselves. The committees made suggestions of a drastic and far-reaching character, some of them disturbingly revolutionary to the administrative mind and yet obviously in line with the needs of a modern taxation system related to changing social factors. Many of them were calculated to affect adversely the status and prospects of the staff themselves, but although vested interests were revealed and to a large extent still remain, a pledge was taken that they would not be permitted to stand in the way of reforms which would increase the efficiency of the department and confer direct benefit upon the tax-paying community. The full test of staff-side sincerity in this direction has still to be applied and its ability to pass this test will depend upon the strength of the workers' movement at the end of the war, and the unity of purpose achieved during its course.

But one thing is certain. The staff of the Revenue Department has made the Whitley machine work better than it ever worked before. It has failed to get the principle of the Joint Production Committee accepted by the official side, but short of that the staff side has been brought into co-operation on every organizational aspect of the work of the department. It would be idle to pretend that ancient prejudices have been entirely overcome on the basis of what has already been achieved. However, it is doubtful if there can ever again be a return to the complete exclusiveness which claimed for the administration a monopoly of the virtues and qualities required to run a department of state in the interests of its public. When the full story of staff relations with the official side inside the Revenue comes to be told, it will provide another clear illustration of our central thesis, that although within the confines of the system the Civil Service in its experiments with democratization can make quite a lot of headway, it will at the same

time suffer certain frustration. It will, however, show how much can be done by a socially conscious staff with a high sense of responsibility for the adequate performance of its public function when they decide that the time has come to claim some part in the running of the state apparatus.

The record of the Assistance Board staff in connection with the revitalizing of Whitley is still more noteworthy. They have gone a long way towards establishing complete joint co-operation with their official side and this has carried them well within the sphere of organization and administration. Here, again, we have a department the members of which have learned considerably from their day-to-day contacts with the less fortunate section of the community. The experience gained through those contacts has broken down the old barriers between public servant and public and the resultant growth of social understanding has forced Whitleyism into hitherto unfamiliar channels.

As with the Revenue Department, the Assistance Board staff side very early got down to the task of reviewing wartime requirements with a view to maximum manpower releases. They were successful, however, where the Revenue staff had failed in securing the appointment of Joint Standing Economy Committees to consider every suggestion. They went on from this to make proposals for the better organization of the 500 local offices of the Assistance Board with a view to improving their effectiveness *vis-à-vis* both the general public and the staff and then placed before their official opposite numbers a scheme complete in every detail for the training of personnel to ensure the right treatment of applicants for assistance at the hands of the staff. This scheme, which is remarkable for its breadth and scope, provided for a series of staff lectures covering every possible aspect of Public Assistance work. It included also a review of the machinery of government, the interrelation of government departments, a detailed analysis of the National Insurance Acts and a session on psychology and case work. Surely if the general body of the community knew the extent to which the staff of the Assistance Board were attempting to fit themselves for their great responsibilities, it would go a long

way towards destroying the pernicious influence of the dreary animadversions against the Civil Service which come so regularly from people like Sir Ernest Benn and others.

But there is more to come. This particular staff side of the departmental Whitley Council felt that it had an important contribution to make even within the sphere of policy from which they and all other staff sides had hitherto been shut out. It will be recognized that in these days of innovation and change it is sometimes impossible to draw a strict dividing line between policy and organization. The *way* in which things are done will often have political or public repercussions equally as great as those which arise directly from the thing itself. In the case, for instance, of the Assistance Board, no one would be in a better position to know where the shoe pinched than the staff who made the direct and intimate contact with those who come to them for assistance and advice.

Naturally, therefore, when the Beveridge Committee was given its task of surveying the whole field of social insurance, the staff side knew at once that they had something worth while to say. They decided therefore to emulate their Revenue colleagues and thereupon produced a printed booklet containing recommendations covering the entire field of social service which they submitted as evidence to the Beveridge Committee.

In this booklet they drew attention to certain gaps in the social services and to the way in which people in need were transferred from one authority to another and back again. They urged a complete reorganization of the social services under a Department of Maintenance and Welfare and with an enlightened and sympathetic administration. The aim of this new department should be, they declared, "to provide a unified maintenance service, to pay adequate allowances to support a reasonable standard of life and to promote the welfare of those who needed something more than cash". The staff side went on to tabulate the multiplicity of departments and other agencies concerned under the existing dispensation with different aspects of social service and insurance and put in a powerful plea for complete co-ordination under a Minister of Social Service. To quote again from the booklet, they

emphasized that "the confusion engendered by a multiplication of services . . . could only be avoided by abolishing the unnecessary boundaries between the various schemes". These boundaries, they said, "came into existence because the public mind was not yet ready for a comprehensive social service but now these boundaries are anachronisms and should be abolished". Finally, they argued that "it should no longer be necessary to decide the *cause* of distress before the distress may be alleviated".

All this was, of course, highly unorthodox. It transcended all previous conceptions of Civil Service trade-union and staff-side function and it caused the usual fluttering within administrative circles. Can it be denied, however, that this sort of approach by civil servants to their official duties and the acknowledgment of their great responsibility towards the community which it suggests give the lie to the carping critics who accuse the Service of unimaginativeness and lack of vision? We have demonstrated clearly that the qualities are there in very large measure. It may be, however, that it will be necessary to descend a little in the Civil Service hierarchy in order to find them.

This is Whitleyism in action. Its drive and dynamic can come initially only from the constitutent unions which give it form and provide its personnel. They must add this to their normal trade union function and thus assist in the process of Civil Service democratization, which it is the object of Whitley, rightly conceived, to bring about.

CHAPTER 10

ARBITRATION

THE Civil Service Arbitration Court was set up in 1925, not without considerable opposition from the government which tried to argue that the Whitley system provided all that was necessary in the way of machinery on wage claims. It took a lot of energy and a parliamentary campaign to persuade them otherwise. The Arbitration Court provides a Court of Appeal to which both official and staff sides can have recourse in the event of the normal machinery of negotiation breaking down. Disputes taken to it must relate either to emoluments, hours of work, or leave.

Questions affecting the structure of a department, promotions, complements, gradings, etc., do not fall therefore within its jurisdiction unless the remuneration factor can be imported into them. The court has a permanent chairman and he is assisted by two assessors, one from a panel nominated by the official side and the other a staff-side nominee. The proceedings follow the customary form. The case for and against is stated. Arguments and evidence are heard and witnesses can be put in. If the case is one which affects a number of classes or the Service as a whole the line up will normally be the national staff side *v.* the Treasury. In other cases, the appropriate Service union will confront the official side of the department concerned, in which case it is usual for a Treasury representative also to be present.

Before the hearing an attempt is made to obtain agreement to terms of remit which then go to the Ministry of Labour. If no agreement between the chairman and his co-assessors is forthcoming an umpire's award can be given and this is equally binding. Probably the most important case taken to the Arbitration Court in recent years was the initial claim for payment of war bonus and a subsequent claim for an upward revision of the bonus terms. These claims rested not only on a

basis of actual fact in relation to the rising cost of living, but of comparison with bonus payments in other spheres of employment outside the Civil Service. It was necessary, therefore, to amass a wealth of data in order to present a fully documented case to the Arbitration Court. This factor of comparison is never far away during the hearing of Service cases. Either the comparison is between Service scales of remuneration and "the long-term trends in outside industry" of which we have already heard so much, or between the work and remuneration of one grade or class in the Service and another. At one time, for instance, the departmental classes, to which reference has earlier been made, lagged behind the general Treasury classes. Then, as a result of a succession of arbitration cases, some of them caught up and one at least passed them.

These comparisons paid very little heed to the relative social value of the duties performed. They were concerned only with the degrees of complexity involved in the operations and quite naturally in presenting a case to the court there was every tendency towards a competitive boosting of the grades and classes whose wage claims were under consideration. That is the sort of thing which inevitably arises from the sometimes unhealthy preoccupation with status which we have had previous occasion to remark and when, too, status is inseparable from the cash that goes therewith.

The Arbitration Court is supposed, of course, to be a completely independent tribunal uninfluenced in its decisions by the policy of the government or the Treasury.

This tradition was in fact fairly well maintained up to the beginning of the war. The present writer has himself been a witness in one arbitration case and can testify to the impartiality which then existed. It is not so certain, however, that this is still the case. A long record of decisions adverse to the staff has been registered during the last year or two and the opinion is gaining ground that the court is becoming more and more susceptible to indirect influence.

The government has, as we know, given a lead to all employers by the publication of a White Paper on wages, intended to discourage and combat inflationary tendencies.

Employers everywhere have not been slow, for their own reasons, to follow that lead, and the Industrial Tribunal has, in a number of notable instances, failed to exert a corrective influence. It is difficult, therefore, to feel assured that the Civil Service Arbitration Court is as impartial and objective in its judgments as it used to be. That, at any rate, is how most of the Service unions feel about it and there is an extreme reluctance on their part to use machinery which may make the redress of legitimate grievances still more difficult.

Here is probably another example of circumstances altering cases and of the sensitive reactions of the state in its employing capacity to external influences.

CHAPTER 11

THE SERVICE PRESS

THE Civil Service press is a by no means insignificant factor in the process of enlightenment which is beginning to provide civil servants with new objectives and a new outlook.

A monthly journal with a guaranteed circulation of over 30,000 is a valuable publicity medium even when that circulation is confined to Service circles. That is the position of *Red Tape*, the organ of the C.S.C.A.

A journal like the *Post*, for which the U.P.W. is responsible, circulating at even more frequent intervals and normally on a regular weekly basis, can and does exert considerable influence over its members.

Taxes, which speaks for the Inland Revenue workers, has an established reputation which many an outside journal would envy. The Ministry of Labour staff run the *Argus*, the Society of Civil Servants, which organizes the executive class, controls *Civil Service Opinion* and the professional and technical workers have a growing circulation for *State Service*. Most of the other big unions have their own monthly journals, and there are in addition a number of branch organs and bulletins. The national staff side publishes its own record of the more important events affecting the Service as a whole. At one time this was a rather dry-as-dust affair, but recently it has become greatly improved and can be read and studied with profit. Many of the Service editors are men of progressive ideas who provide an open forum for the expression of every political point of view of an anti-fascist character. The standard of Service journalism is high and it goes on improving. Unfortunately there is no national Civil Service organ (apart from the *Whitley Bulletin*) which can speak for the Service as a whole. Almost forty years ago the *Civilian* appeared for a while but it contained little more than advertisements and a record of appointments, transfers and promotions, and read more

like a court circular than anything else. Another attempt to launch an all-service journal was made in 1928, when the *New Civilian* was launched under the able editorship of A. J. Brown, who for many years has been in charge of *Taxes*. This started with a flourish but subsequently languished and finally collapsed for lack of support from the unions after a year or two of precarious existence. There can be no doubt that when the war is over the Civil Service will consider again the possibility and desirability of running its own paper, not as the expression of vested interests, but rather to strengthen the at present all too weak progressive and working-class press. Meanwhile the already existing high standard of production and contribution offers an assurance that such an organ would exert a powerful influence for good. It would act too as a deterrent against attempts now being made to use the Civil Service as a scapegoat for sins, the responsibility for which lies elsewhere.

CHAPTER 12

CIVIL LIBERTIES FOR CIVIL SERVANTS

"THE British Political system depends upon the integrity and political impartiality of the Civil Service."[1] Now let us look at the official regulations governing the conduct of civil servants. Officers we are told must be careful in their private conduct to do nothing which might bring discredit upon the department. That is clear and unobjectionable.

"The State is entitled to demand that its servants shall not only be honest in fact but beyond the reach of suspicion of dishonesty." Here already we are in deep water. Not only must the civil servant be sinless but neither must the shadow of sin, even someone else's sin, rest upon him. "A civil servant is not to subordinate his duty to his private interests *but* neither is he to put himself in a position where interest and duty conflict. He is not to make use of his official position to further those interests but neither is he so to order his private affairs as to allow the suspicion to arise that a trust has been abused or a confidence betrayed." And now veritably we drown. The state employee can, it appears, have private interests and he need not allow his public duty to come before them—but only presumably if there is no conflict between them. Moreover, he must not only keep official secrets but maintain such a hold over his friends—and enemies—as to ensure that he is not brought under suspicion. And finally, "He is not to indulge in political or party controversy and must, in short, maintain a reserve in all political matters."

This civil servant, in fact, is to dress himself up as a sort of moral and political eunuch, or to change the metaphor, as an idealized entity without passion or parts. He enters the Service as the novitiate enters the order or convent, becoming not as other men and keeping himself henceforth unspotted from the world. Sterilized and immunized he can then be

[1] Emmeline Cohen, *History of the British Civil Service*.

subject of a pamphlet which received a wide circulation at the time. This was a case in which a fake burglary was made the opportunity for "lifting" documents which it was afterwards alleged had been wrongfully detained by Major Vernon, then a technical officer employed at a government aircraft establishment. On the basis of this evidence, attempts were made to prove that Major Vernon was a communist, something which neither then nor now can be said to constitute a crime against British law, and that he had contravened the Official Secrets Act. For one or other of these alleged misdemeanours, there is some doubt which, Major Vernon was discharged by the Air Ministry and in spite of strenuous attempts to secure his reinstatement, during the course of which a thorough investigation of the case was undertaken by W. J. Brown, M.P., he is still outside the Civil Service. Brown stated with regard to this case that "Major Vernon possessed no information which could not be accounted for on grounds entirely creditable to him and that he was prepared to prove that before any independent tribunal". The offer was not however accepted.

As some slight compensation for a deprivation of the right to behave like a fully adult and politically conscious human being, the civil servant receives a few special privileges.

He is for instance exempt from liability for any act committed by him on behalf of the state. One civil servant in a hundred thousand might be affected by that generous concession. He is also entitled to claim exemption from jury service and cannot be *compelled* to act as a mayor or sheriff—that is a delicate touch of irony. Again the civil servant is not required to give evidence in court if by so doing he would prejudice the public interest, and finally he cannot be sued for slander or libel based on a communication made by him on official matters to another crown servant. Here is richness indeed. The whole lot, however, adds up so far as the great body of civil servants are concerned, to just precisely nothing. They are completely offset by two further *verbotens*. The first prevents a state employee from becoming bankrupt, under penalty of dismissal, without prior notification to the head of the department of his intention. The second warns him against

the mortal sin of "soliciting a colleague for pecuniary accommodation". The approach of an officer to his subordinate for such a purpose is regarded as a particularly grave offence. In matters of this kind the Treasury it will be seen betters the advice of Polonius—"Neither a borrower nor a lender be"—but what is more to the point never try and touch your official inferiors for even the smallest loan.

There is always this fear of financial misdemeanour at the back of the Treasury mind and many of the restrictive regulations governing the conduct of civil servants seem to be aimed at a prevention of the peculation that helped so many of them in the bad old days to feather their nests. What the people who frame the regulations seem never to appreciate is that the really disinterested individual is the one whose social conscience and political understanding are both equally well developed. Such a one may, it is much to be hoped that he will, take an increasingly active part in contemporary politics, however controversial, but he will rate his responsibility towards the community too highly to indulge in any sort of graft at its expense. The Tory politicians and the non-politicals (so called) who try to equate a politically conscious Civil Service with a return to the spoils system know that precisely the opposite is true. The attempt to curtail the political liberties of the public servant has one primary reason—it is to create a docile state apparatus which will come to heel when called—and the rest quite patently is blah.

The majority of civil servants may not as yet be fully alive to the dangers which accompany a restriction of civil liberty in the pure political sense, though events are increasing awareness, but there is one direction in which that majority is very certain that it has suffered a grievous loss.

We have learned of the attempts made by successive governments to persuade civil servants that they were of different clay from the rest of the working community by hedging them round with restraints and providing a relative security of tenure in return for an unquestioning loyalty. We have seen too how at every point of examination the case for this artificial segregation has broken down by the government's own

intention not to permit Service conditions of work and remuneration to get "out of step" with those of comparable categories outside. We are now to get an even clearer insight into this policy of splitting off the state employee from his fellow worker in office, factory, mine or shop. In other words, we introduce the reader to Section 5 of the Trade Disputes Act of 1927, a piece of legislation which has for sixteen years cast a shadow over the work of every truly educated Civil Service trade unionist, and robbed much of it of its final effectiveness.

All the gains of Service unionism described in a previous chapter would have been impossible without the earlier struggles of the industrial pioneers. Affiliation to the T.U.C. was the measure of appreciation on the part of some of the larger Service unions of that indisputable fact. What more natural then that when the depression of the post-war years produced conditions which sent the figures of unemployment soaring and gave rise to the industrial unrest which culminated in the miners' strike in 1926, the organized workers in the Civil Service had no desire to stand aside. It would be absurd to create the impression that all the members of all the unions were favourably disposed to the idea of linking their destinies with such a body as the T.U.C. Many of them had been conditioned by the methods adopted for that purpose and feared the "bolshevization" of the Civil Service as much as some people fear the bolshevization of Europe to-day. But it is none the less true that the *right* of decision was very much cherished by most civil servants and in the case of the U.P.W., the C.S.C.A., the Post Office Engineering Union and the Association of Officers of Taxes (now the Inland Revenue Staff Federation) affiliation had already been entered into.

When the miners struck they did so as a reaction to vicious cuts in their already subsistence-rate wages by the coal owners, whose action was precipitated by the government's withdrawal of its subsidy from the coal industry under a plea of national economy.

The General Strike, as we know, came about as a result of sympathetic action on the part of the other large unions. It was represented by Tory interests as a threat against the state

and therefore an illegal act, although the Archbishop of Canterbury had said that "there was no shred of revolutionary or unconstitutional sentiment in its inception". The Civil Service unions became involved through a request to the affiliated unions to state where they stood with regard to:

1. Calling their members out on strike, and
2. Contributing towards the fund for relieving distress among the miners.

To the first question the answer could only be no, because there was nothing in the constitution of any of the organizations concerned which could authorize them to pledge their members to strike action. The answer to the second question was yes—the only possible answer, but one for which the Service has paid a very heavy price. Tory Members of Parliament, always ready and anxious to throw a brick at the Civil Service, asked questions in the House, an enquiry was held and the honorary officers of one of the affiliated unions were for some time in danger of losing their jobs. And then the strike collapsed and reprisals commenced. They took the form of the Trade Disputes Act, described in knowledgeable quarters as the most vicious piece of class legislation on the Statute Book. Whether that is a true description or not may be a matter for dispute. There can be no possible controversy however as to its effect on the Civil Service. Henceforth the employees of the state were to be protected from themselves. Never again must they be allowed to feel generous indignation at the wrong done to other sections of the working class. Not theirs to express any feelings of organized solidarity. The "state" had been endangered. Civil servants were the employees of the state. Never again, as the present Prime Minister said when, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, he received a deputation from the Civil Service Defence Committee in March, 1927, must there be any temptation to participate in subversive actions of that kind against the constitution. Section 5 of the act would henceforth see to that. From the date of its passing it would be impossible for any established civil servant to belong to an organization, the primary object of which was to affect or to

influence remuneration or conditions of employment, unless that organization confined its membership to persons employed by or under the crown, and was not itself affiliated to any other such organization, the membership of which was not so restricted—or to any body which had political objects or was directly or indirectly associated with any political party or organization.

And so it was. Failing to put blinkers on the Service they could at least put it in irons. Already politically deformed the civil servant must henceforth confront his employer with one hand tied behind him. His conditions of service as we have seen were more or less predetermined by "the long-term trend in industry", but to make common cause with the industrial worker was denied to him. The point was made very cogently by W. J. Brown during the aforementioned deputation to the Chancellor, when he pointed out that it was entirely paradoxical for the Treasury to say "we are going to quote the wages of outside people against your claims for better conditions, but we refuse to allow you to associate with them in a common effort to improve the conditions of both of you". But no arguments based on common sense, economics or equity could be expected to prevail against the blind prejudice or calculated hostility of reactionary politicians. Civil Service Defence Committees were formed all over the country, protest meetings were addressed by Service union leaders, M.P.s were lobbied, and a strong fight was put up in the House of Commons, but the Tories were in full cry. The hunt was up. Civil servants were discovering all sorts of affinities with other classes of workers. If you pricked them they bled—if you reduced the standard of living of the miners it might, who knows, be their turn next.

This was "subversive". The rot must be stopped. Section 5 with the rest of the Trades Disputes Act became law. For sixteen years since then the Service unions have worked for its repeal. In this they have had the support of all the big industrial unions and more latterly of the T.U.C. itself. When the war broke out there was a general understanding that legislation of a controversial nature should not be introduced.

This agreement was rendered farcical by the acute controversy introduced by the Tories into the debates upon such government-sponsored legislation as the Catering Bill, but it was invoked to dissuade anyone from seeking to reopen the question of the Trade Disputes Act or any part of it. The organized trade union movement had already made considerable sacrifices of hard-won rights. Even under provocation they had expressed themselves in favour of the continued avoidance of unnecessary political strife, but in 1941 an approach was made to the Prime Minister by the T.U.C. in order to discover his reactions to a move to introduce amending legislation. He was asked whether, as leader of the Tory party, he would be prepared to approach his colleagues so that if possible the matter could be put on a non-controversial basis. The approach was made and in December, 1941, a meeting took place between representatives of the T.U.C. and a group of Tories delegated by the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations. The results were completely negative. It became as clear as daylight that whatever the Prime Minister himself was prepared to concede, he was under restraint from his Tory associates. Every argument, whether drawn from the economics or the social justice of the case, fell on deliberately deaf ears. No agreement was reached, and apart from sporadic agitation nothing further happened until the summer of 1943, when the issue was forced a stage further by the Union of Post Office workers, which decided at its annual conference to make a direct application to the T.U.C. for reaffiliation.

This, be it said, was not in itself and despite the existence of Section 5 an illegal act. The section was aimed at the individual civil servant who joined the 'wrong' sort of union. If, of course, he chose to remain a member of an organization which had resumed its formal association with the T.U.C. he rendered himself liable to the pains and penalties provided for cases in which the rules which govern the employment of civil servants were contravened. It seems clear that numbers of Post Office employees were prepared to take that risk.

The application was in due course received by the T.U.C. and Sir Walter Citrine made it clear that he would recommend

its acceptance to annual congress in the following September. Before then, however, things began to happen in other quarters. The government issued a general warning to civil servants threatening the withdrawal of pension rights in the event of their attempting to sidestep the section, whereupon the staff side of the National Whitley Council entered the lists and endeavoured to secure a settlement out of court—entirely without success.

Then in August, 1943, three of the unions previously affiliated to the T.U.C., the C.S.C.A., the Inland Revenue Staff Federation and the Post Office Engineering Union, succeeded in persuading the Prime Minister to receive a deputation.

The Prime Minister met the representatives of the three unions with fair words but empty hands. He repeated the warning given to recalcitrant civil servants and refused to discuss any possible modification of the law unless the application of the U.P.W. for affiliation was withdrawn. Indeed, he held out very little hope that even in those circumstances the government would be prepared to do business. When, however, the suggestion was made that the act might perhaps be amended to permit of industrial affiliation only, leaving the larger issue of political contact until after the war, he agreed to discuss the idea with his cabinet colleagues. The next move was made by the U.P.W. which, in order to leave the way clear for further discussions, withdrew its application. By that time the Prime Minister was in America but on his return the same organizations with the addition of the U.P.W. put in a written request for another interview with him. And the rest, up to the present, is silence. It seems impossible to escape the conclusion that the stranglehold imposed upon the Service by Section 5 is to be maintained for just so long as the writ of the Tory party runs. This in spite of the fact that every day of the war brings fresh evidence in support of the constantly repeated assertion that you cannot deal with the Civil Service as a class apart.

To bring this story up to date, news is recently to hand of a request from the Prime Minister for further details of the proposal for restricted affiliation on a purely industrial basis.

This information, after consultation with the T.U.C., has been supplied, and by the time this book appears, a definite decision one way or the other will, we hope, have been taken.

In hundreds of ways, civil servants are being affected by wartime regulations and orders applicable to every class of worker. They work in establishments scheduled under the Essential Works Order and their movements are restricted accordingly. They suffer similar restrictions in prohibited areas. In many instances Service unions have been obliged by arrangement with the government to confer upon matters in which state employees and industrial workers have a common interest with the very body with which they were forbidden to establish an organizational link. The government includes the Civil Service within the scope of its plan for all-in social insurance and it ought not to be long before the relative security of tenure and pensionability of the established Civil Service is a *sine qua non* of all categories of employment. Moreover, as we have seen, the Service unions and Whitley bodies, the members of which come into daily contact with the public, are destined to take an increasingly large share of responsibility for the efficient application of post-war social legislation in terms of practical departmental organization. To force them to remain aloof from the industrial unions whose members will benefit or otherwise by the degree of effectiveness of that organization is fantastic. If the ban is maintained it will only be because the present House of Commons is entirely unrepresentative of the popular will. Seen in relation to other significant moves on the part of the more reactionary Tories, their adamantine refusal to concede this bare measure of overdue justice leaves a nasty taste in the mouth. They seek by sterilizing the Civil Service to make it 'safe'. It will then be ready for the new role assigned to it by big business. We shall see later what that role is to be. Meanwhile Section 5 must go. Conceived in industrial unrest, born of frightened reaction, it has succeeded in becoming a peculiarly nasty adolescent.

Practically the whole Civil Service trade union movement would welcome, and indeed is working for, its early demise.

CHAPTER 13

WOMEN IN THE CIVIL SERVICE

In the year 1874 one of many Royal Commissions expressed itself in the following guarded terms:

"Experience shows that women are well qualified for clerical work of a less important character and are satisfied with a lower rate of pay than men similarly employed. . . . As regards the ordinary clerical work of an office, however, we are not prepared to recommend their employment unless they can be placed in separate rooms under proper female supervision."

That burst of candour almost seventy years ago sheds a lot of illumination on the economic reasons underlying the grudging and partial concessions made from time to time to the general principle of sex equality. But it didn't get the women very far in 1874, because forty years later another commission still held that "in regard to the power of sustained work, in continuity of service and in adaptability to varying service conditions, the advantage lies with men". War, however, as we have seen, sweeps away a lot of archaic rubbish and by 1920 women had caught up to such an extent that it was possible for a Reorganization Committee set up at that time to agree that "within parallel classes of the Civil Service women should be given a status and authority identical with that accorded to man".

The same committee recommended equality of training and opportunity for promotion and regarded segregation as merely a matter of departmental expediency. In general it looked favourably on the idea of men and women working side by side on duties of a similar character, whereat the Grundys of the Service, apart from an obstinate few, lay down and died. But as it happens, that was only the beginning of the real fight for the application of the principle herein enunciated in economic terms.

It is true that the Tomlin Commission in 1929 recommended "a fair field and no favour" as the guiding principle for the employment of women in the Service and the opening of all sorts of doors hitherto closed to them, but on the question of equal pay to match equal opportunity the commission was hopelessly divided.

In actual fact the principle of equal pay for men and women had already been accepted by the House of Commons, which, in the Sex Disqualification Act of 1920, laid it down that "women should have equal opportunity with men in all branches of the Civil Service and under all local authorities . . . and should also receive equal pay". The value of this gesture was however completely destroyed by the addition of a proviso which permitted regulations by Order in Council providing for the conditions under which women should be admitted to the Civil Service. This has the effect of limiting the sphere of opportunity by excluding women from certain administrative posts. The equal pay provisions were similarly held in abeyance and the issue was again revived during the Baldwin administration in 1936, when the government was defeated but did not resign. And again nothing was done about it.

Harking back to the Royal Commission of 1929 it will be of interest to note some of the arguments brought to bear against the claim for equal pay.

The Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Labour for instance said that "the effect of granting equal pay would be regarded by trade and industry as tending to embarass them". Readers of this book will be now be familair with this attitude of tender solicitude displayed by government spokesmen towards private enterprise. It was also urged that women were in the long run incapable of giving quite the same service as their male colleagues and that equality for women might result in injustice for men since it would probably be determined by reference to the women's scales. Women, it was urged, were more often incapacitated and the continuity of their service was broken by marriage, a fact which reduced their value to the state. This argument is of course wholly inconsistent

with the attitude adopted by the state towards the retention of women in the Service on marriage to which we shall come later.

The beginning of the war brought the claim for equal pay for equal work very little nearer fruition.

An agreement with the Treasury in 1937 had the effect of closing the gap to some extent. It provided that women civil servants should enjoy a maximum of not less than four-fifths of the corresponding scales for men and conceded equality at the minimum for all openly recruited grades, The agreement was without prejudice to the claim of the staff unions for complete equality, and that claim is still being pressed. Meanwhile the position becomes more and more indefensible.

The war has once again increased enormously the area of female employment. In many of those areas, notably in transport and certain engineering operations, equal pay for men and women engaged on similar work is the rule. The case against it no longer rests therefore on a comparative basis. In every government office, women are sitting side by side with men, performing duties of equal responsibility and complexity and getting paid less for them. The men, in the long run, like it as little as the women and every Service union, on the Executive Committees of which there are still many more men than there should be, are pledged to fight for equality. It is only necessary for that fight to be waged in the complete realization that it is only one aspect, though an important one, of the general struggle for a change in productive relationships and for a socialist economy for it to become more vigorous and successful. The purely feminist approach gets us nowhere and no one realizes this more than the majority of the women themselves. There is nothing naïve in the assertion that the attitude of the Treasury towards equal pay and the conditions under which women are employed in the Civil Service are largely influenced by the fact that monopoly capitalism still depends upon the maintenance of the family as an economic as well as a social unit. That position they would fight to the last ditch to defend, and although within the sphere of state employment breaches have been made, and the principle of equal pay

conceded, we are still a long way from its practical application. Nothing in the history of the struggle for complete sex-equality in the Civil Service stands out quite so clearly as the fact that the position outlined by Engels in his *Origin of the Family*, written in 1884, is still in essentials the one which determines the Treasury attitude towards women in 1943.

Another aspect of the same problem is the position with regard to the continued employment of women in the Service on marriage. Statistics presented by the official side to the Royal Commission in 1929 showed that of 10,000 women recruited into the Civil Service at the age of 20, approximately 2,200 resigned on marriage before they reached 25, and 2,700 before the age of 30. The figures in themselves prove nothing however since there is no means of ascertaining how many of these women would have elected to remain in the Service if the regulations had permitted. Another factor which makes for difficulty in getting at the real views of the women themselves is the dowry question. At present every established woman Civil Servant is entitled to a marriage gratuity after six years' service. As in the case of superannuation this too can be regarded as a form of deferred pay. In any case it acts as a sop to reconcile women to the interruption of an official career and causes many of them to hesitate before demanding a right of retention which they fear would only be conceded at the price of a sacrifice of a cash payment to which, quite understandably, those who go out feel they have a right. The women members of the C.S.C.A. voted for the retention of the marriage bar in 1937 mainly on these grounds.[1] Most of the Service unions however are in favour of its abolition, though it is true to say that there has been no real attempt on the part of some of them to examine the bases of a purely theoretical support. The Royal Commission recommended the retention of the marriage bar subject to the discretionary power of departments to make exception "where any disadvantage arising from the employment of a married woman would be outweighed by her special qualifications or experience". This proviso, apart from the fact that it has nothing whatever to do

[1] This decision was reversed at its last annual conference.

with the justice of the case that a married woman has as much right to work as a married man, in practice limits the exceptions to the administrative and professional classes. For the bulk of the women in the Service it can only mean automatic resignation on marriage.

The war has again introduced the inevitable modifications of normal practice. Departmental expansion and the call-up have brought thousands of married women into the Service and have forced the Treasury to offer continued employment to those who have married 'on the strength'. But this has only been on a basis of re-engagement in a temporary capacity and the end of the war may very well see the automatic termination of service of a considerable number of able and experienced officers.

This is, indeed, inevitable if the sex war which followed upon demobilization in 1918 is allowed to break out again, and the demand goes forth from organizations which claim, very often on slender grounds, to speak for ex-servicemen for the dismissal of all married women from government service in order to make room for men. From the woman's point of view, the retention of the marriage bar is entirely a question of economic expediency. Freed from any fear that the marriage gratuity would be lost to all because a proportion desired to remain in post, the majority would vote for the right to decide either way. The attitude of the male opponent to abolition is equally dictated by economic factors and the general precariousness from which, as we have seen, even the Civil Service is not immune. In the all too familiar circumstances of the period between two wars with mounting unemployment as the inevitable corollary of scarcity economics, there could be no permanent place for married women in the labour market. Beveridge himself has postulated a full employment policy as providing the only sort of context in which social security can be achieved and maintained.

The same assumptions must provide the basis for any real advance towards the abolition of the marriage bar in the Civil Service. Meanwhile both men and women civil servants must get their own ideas on the subject straight. It is useless for

them to agitate for the removal of restrictions on civil liberty while accepting without challenge a ban on the right to work except in circumstances of the government's own choosing. The nature and purpose of any state apparatus can in no better way be judged than by its attitude towards such questions as equal pay and the marriage bar. By that touchstone our own Civil Service again fails to measure up the standards adopted by the Soviet Union, where the right to work of every able-bodied man and woman is constitutionally guaranteed.

CHAPTER 14

CRITICISM

THE Civil Service has always been a butt for criticism. It has come in the main either from ill-informed members of the public who have come to regard every form issuing from a government department as a personal insult, or from the representatives of vested interests seeking a screen for their own anti-social conduct together with their gullible supporters.

For some curious and unfathomable reason, the mass of the British people have until recently allowed themselves to be persuaded that the machinery of the state is an unnecessary extravagance kept in being by a self-elected class of Tweedle-dums and Tweedledees who enjoy a parasitic existence at the expense of the British taxpayer.

This is part of the technique adopted by that irrepressible individualist, Sir Ernest Benn, in his almost daily attempts to discredit the Civil Service. To-day he has many imitators and it will be as well to examine closely some of the things they are saying. Here are some specimens:

"Ministers and Parliament have now ceased to function as the Reform Act intended, and have degenerated into mere advertising agents and registering offices for the schemes of the new governing class still strangely called the Civil Service."

Again:

"The People . . . having insisted on governing everything, will awaken to discover that they are governed *in* everything by a new class which, because it is and must be apart from the People and above them, carries on the business of Government for the mere sake of governing and incidentally and naturally for its own benefit."[1]

Note this insidious suggestion that the Civil Service is apart

[1] Sir Ernest Benn, *Modern Government.*

from and above the people. It has a strangely familiar ring. Surely these are more or less the terms used by Lenin in his description and interpretation of the monopoly-capitalist state apparatus. Is this the devil quoting scripture? Is Sir Ernest Benn agreeing with the writer of this book that under a dispensation which functions not on behalf of the whole people but only on behalf of a privileged minority the state itself must in the long run act as the protector and ally of that minority? Surely not; for as President of the Society of Individualists he is very closely associated with that selfsame privileged minority.

All the big combines, whose solicitude for the small man has been demonstrated by casting him for the role of "the lady of Riga", have supported his programme and they and he have sworn to fight "the collapse and calamity which lurk in the wake of collectivism". What does Sir Ernest mean then when he criticizes the Civil Service for placing itself "above and apart from the People"? Does he want it to be so near to the people as to be indistinguishable from them—as near as the rank-and-file workers in the Assistance Board, Ministry of Labour, Revenue and other departments of state are getting as a result of new social legislation? I doubt it. Who are these "People" then who are being "governed by the Civil Service"? Are they the millions who pin their faith in Scott, Barlow, Uthwatt and Beveridge as the basic structure of a better post-war Britain? Are these the "People" who are enduring sleepless nights at the thought of the increased numbers of civil servants who may be required to administer these and other plans for social reconstruction? Again, I doubt it. Or when Sir Ernest Benn speaks of "the People" is he thinking of the privileged minority after all—the 120 industrialists who signed a manifesto urging the removal of controls after the war; the insurance companies who would destroy Beveridge if they could; the speculative builders who see in Barlow and Uthwatt the end of their hopes of a post-war exploitation of the housing needs of the people.

If *these* are "the People" it can safely be said that the old Civil Service has never been very far away from *them*. It has

been kept on far too short a lead ever to follow its own devices in the way Sir Ernest suggests. It will indeed become even more closely identified with those who at present "control the machinery of production", unless the profit motive is very radically reduced in importance. That sort of identification would be just another variation on the fascist theme, and if that is not what Sir Ernest Benn wants he must say goodbye to his nineteenth-century individualism and prepare to see an increase rather than a decrease in the size of the Civil Service. That will be a development which need in no way dismay "the People" because there is no reason why it should not be at the same time a Civil Service shorn of the bureaucratic tendencies for which its present attachment to "the system" is largely responsible. But it will certainly dismay Sir Ernest because he believes that "the battle of the haves and the have-nots will proceed throughout the ages and the next phase may be a battle between those who as producers keep the country going, and those who as officials succeed in securing most of the sweets".

It may bring equal dismay to Sir George Nelson, President of the Federation of British Industries, who is quoted as saying that "nationalization would mean the gearing of industry to the State machine and that its speed would be that of the slowest unit" . . . and that "State control does not have to pass efficiency tests, it survives in spite of itself and at the expense of the community".

This is not the place to argue the merits or demerits of nationalization, but an irresponsible statement of this kind does provide the opportunity to point to the achievements of the Ministry of Munitions in the last war and the Ministry of Food in this. As for efficiency, the record of private enterprise in this country during the last twenty-five years is not one which need give rise to an inferiority complex on the part of the Civil Service. The fact of the matter is, that almost the whole of the criticisms coming from this quarter are directed against defects which could never hope to survive the reconstruction of the Service in order to ensure its use by the people for the people. Dr. Herman Finer, whose knowledge of the Service is unrivalled, goes to the root of the matter when he points out

that "much of the abuse of the Civil Service is due to the ferocious antagonism to State interference with industry".[1] A socialized state is, he suggests, inevitably a Civil Service state, and he looks no further than this for a reason to explain the bitter hostility towards the Service on the part of those who see the reins of government slipping from their grasp.

Another critic from the camp of the individualists is Capt. Gammans, M.P. for Hornsey, who in a reply to Professor Laski, printed in the *Evening Standard*, expressed doubt as to the wisdom of nationalizing the mines because he was not convinced that the state was an ideal employer. He referred to the low-paid postal worker and the unskilled grades in the royal dockyards in support of this priceless piece of prescience. He should tell that not to the marines but to the unions which have been fighting for years to improve the conditions of these classes of civil servants, while the individualists and anti-planners have resisted every insignificant rise in the cost of the public services. The Civil Service needs no telling that it is underpaid, but Capt. Gammans and his friends cannot have it both ways. They are not entitled to regard Civil Servants as pampered parasites enriching themselves at the expense of the people and at the same time to accuse the state of being anything but an ideal employer.

The same gentleman asks whether, given a state-controlled coal industry the miners will still retain the right to strike—to which of course there can be only one reply, which is—that given the right kind of state, serving (forgive the wearisome réiteration) "all the people", will they want to—and on whose side will Capt. Gammans be if they do?

There is of course another kind of criticism which is genuine and sincere if not always helpful or well-informed. For reasons which we hope are now becoming obvious, the Civil Service cannot be as efficient as the majority of its individual members of whatsoever class or grade would wish it to be. It is an institution operating within a system and developing with it. It has evolved its own special customs and codes, of course, but nevertheless it functions within limits imposed by a

[1] Dr. Herman Finer, *The British Civil Service.*

society which is itself in process of change and decay. It can to some extent help or hinder that process but it can in no sense contract out of it. It can be reformed and reconstructed, of course, just as any other part of the system can be reformed and every reform can be made a part of the evolutionary process, but its major defects will never be eradicated until it becomes a real service of the people. We must bear these things in mind when we come to examine the sort of criticisms made by J. P. W. Mallalieu, in his recent book on the Service, *Passed to You, Please*. In this case the criticisms are genuine and the general conclusions sound. The picture is, however, overdrawn and the changes for the better which are already coming about are not sufficiently emphasized. Perhaps it requires a civil servant to do justice to that aspect. Far too many criticisms of the Service have been made by those who have studied it only from the public side of the counter. Take for instance this difficult question of forms. In their ever increasing numbers and complexity no one would seek to defend them all. A lot could be done to effect both reduction and simplification given a greater measure of co-ordination. When for instance the whole of the social services are combined under one Ministry of Social Security there can be also a single form to serve a combination of purposes. The unintelligibility of many of the forms in use throughout the Service is nevertheless inexcusable. In many cases they are the creation of minds incapable of seeing the end results which the form is designed to achieve, or the point of view of the people who are required to complete them. Minds incapable too of translating the wording of acts and statutory rules and orders into simple everyday language. Addressing themselves to millions of people at different levels of intelligence they attempt to express meanings in terms of formal logic with all the humanity left out.

This is a true bill and it would be absurd to defend it, but there are nevertheless extenuating circumstances. Take for instance the forms used by the income-tax authorities than which none surely could be less popular. Some part of their seeming complexity is undoubtedly due to the archaic traditions

to which the work of assessing and collecting income tax has been until recently required to conform. When not so very long ago attempts were made to introduce legislation with a view to freeing our fiscal system from those ancient trammels, it was not the civil servants but the landed vested interests which rallied round and caused the House of Lords to veto the Revenue Bill.

The war is making a bonfire of a lot of that vestigial rubbish and a note of greater simplicity is already being observed as a consequence. But the taxation system of this country is still based on a method of personal allowances to enable it, according to the authorities, to conform to principles of equity as between one taxpayer and another. Those allowances, both as to their amount and the conditions in which they can be given, are rooted in a social system based upon dependence and a whole network of relationships. How can it be easy then to devise forms which will bring out the essential facts with regard to those relationships in order to convert them into a relief for a housekeeper, a dependent relative or an adopted child, to take only three of many? Again, given a system which compels people to a grudging and unlovely thrift and therefore to an investment in a hundred and one different types of life assurance, etc., how can you hope to effect complete simplicity where the forms for recording this and other information are concerned? If you then go on to encourage people to buy their own houses and to mortgage them, or to invest if they can afford it in stocks and shares, how again do you hope to discover the true position of twelve million people in terms of taxable income without asking a lot of seemingly irrelevant questions? Don't blame the Civil Service for that. You can never hope to simplify some of the forms sent out by government departments until you have simplified the economic system which creates the need for them. Examine the forms in common use throughout the Service and you will find that the greater number are necessary only because the prevailing motives in our unplanned society are greed, fear and mutual distrust.

Take again the circumlocution and adherence to routine,

instances of which crowd Mallalieu's book. Much of this has been inculcated in the Service by the "fetch and carry" role normally assigned to it. If civil servants could feel that their function and purpose were harmonious with the real needs of the people, and if as well they were not at all times subject to irresponsible and damaging criticism they would tend to develop a greater sense of proportion and a good deal more imagination. Already the exigencies of the war situation are curing a lot of bad habits. Relaxation of hitherto sacrosanct methods of procedure are the order of the day and there are thousands of responsible civil servants with thirty or forty years of tradition behind them beginning to find exceeding merit in the simpler solutions of today.

The same reply could be made to the charge so often levelled against the Service that it prefers to follow precedent rather than assume responsibility for decisions based upon the facts of a particular case. That is one of the usual half truths from which the public service has suffered from time immemorial. Routine and precedent have their necessary place in every scheme of organization and you cannot run a government lepartment charged with the responsibility of reducing com- ›licated legislation to detailed instructions for application to millions of individual cases without them. If they are followed blindly and without regard to changed circumstances, they undoubtedly lead to the bureaucratic attitude of mind which every intelligent civil servant strives always to avoid. In many departments today, particularly those which make direct contact with the public, there is a tremendous amount of delegated responsibility to officers of almost every grade for the settlement of cases without reference to a higher authority. Large areas of the clerical staff are taking over more or less executive functions for the duration and wartime 'relaxations' have brought a great increase in personal initiative.

These criticisms link up with another which accuses the Civil Service of being too remote from the world of business—too blind to the ways of the great 'outside'.

Well, you cannot have it both ways. If you choose to treat the Civil Service as a vocation you cannot expect its votaries

to go out into the market-place. If you hedge the civil servant round with all sorts of restrictions upon his political liberty you can hardly expect him to be up to the minute in his knowledge of commercial practice and the economics of capitalism. But here again there is a lot of progress to record. The income-tax official is himself a taxpayer. The people employed in the local offices of the Ministry of Food know all about rationing from the public angle. An Assistance Board official dealing with a war damage claim may himself have been blitzed the night before. The public counter is not quite the barrier to mutual understanding that it used to be. On both sides of it there are fellow citizens who have a mutual interest in the better planning of our national resources and the more enlightened administration necessary to convert principles into practice.

A partial answer to all these criticisms is supplied by Professor Laski in his foreword to Mr. Mallalieu's book when he says that "the traditional qualities of the Civil Service arise out of the function it is called upon to fulfil in a *laissez-faire* society". He agrees that so far as the administrative class is concerned it has a number of virtues, among them "tact, competence and a real zest for administrative perfection". On the debit side, however, he places "absence of imagination, audacity and an unwillingness to experiment". He accuses it of avoiding actions which may offend powerful interests and thinks that "innovation, frankness and adaptation are not parts of its genius". These are major criticisms and one can only express the hope that they lead Professor Laski to the inescapable conclusions which this book is attempting to draw.

Actually, of course, as we have seen, there has never been any such thing as a completely *laissez-faire* society. Even in the heyday of free competition, as we have seen, there was a measure of state interference. Its form has varied from time to time but its fundamental purpose, to protect private enterprise very often against itself, has never changed.

If the anti-planners have their way, its form will again change. Monopoly would then demand of the state what the German industrialists demanded of Hitler—a free hand within

its own spheres of exploitation and the repression of trade-union and working-class organization. In a later chapter we shall see what that would mean for the Civil Service. Meanwhile it is vitally important that criticism should be constructive. The more enlightened and forward-looking the government which has to handle the problems of peace, the more it will need to rely upon a highly trained, well educated (in the best sense) and politically conscious body of disinterested civil servants.

If the general public can be persuaded to grasp that fundamental principle now it will look with sympathy at every attempt on the part of the Service to change its own nature. The Civil Service will do that as easily as any other body of workers under the impact of social and environmental change. To quote Professor MacMurray: "Negative government creates a negative Civil Service. Positive democracy needs a positive Civil Service which is with the people wholeheartedly and eagerly in its struggle for a fuller human life."[1]

That is a view to which the larger part of the Civil Service itself will say a fervent amen.

[1] Professor John MacMurray, *Constructive Democracy.*

CHAPTER 15

THE SERVICE IN WAR-TIME

DURING the war of 1914-18 we saw in this country a rapid expansion of the state apparatus due in the main to the controls inseparable from a war economy.

The Board of Trade for instance, acting through a Railway Executive Committee, took charge of the railways, and agriculture was to a large extent controlled jointly by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Food Department.

The Ministry of Munitions established control over 130 national factories. "It did more for the advance of British industry in three years than had been accomplished by private enterprise in the previous twenty."[1] The Ministry of Shipping organized the import trade of the country in relation to available shipping, and the Ministry of Food was responsible for the bulk supply of commodities in addition to exercising a control over prices and taking over functions hitherto performed by the countless numbers of pre-war parasites who operated between the producer and consumer. No one can read the history of that period without arriving at the conclusion that without this high degree of centralized planning and control the war would never have been won. The position with regard to shipping was for instance in complete chaos until the government, reluctantly at first, stepped in and adopted every conceivable device to make a little go a long way and gradually to increase available tonnage to meet transport needs in some order of priority. This immense task of organization was carried out by civil servants, and it was said that if the war had continued the whole of the transport and organization necessary to supply not only the armed forces but the civilian community with essential commodities would have been in the hands of Whitehall. When the end of the war came we know of course what happened. The controls

[1] L. Chiozza Money, *The Triumph of Nationalisation*.

were removed with almost indecent haste and everything was handed back to private enterprise with results which furnished some of the factors leading up to September, 1939.

And now once again the state apparatus is expanding to meet the needs of a war economy. This time the controls are even more extensive and complicated.

A comparison between them and the controls of 1914-18 would be a profitable subject for study. Here it is only possible to draw attention to the greater identification of big business with the machinery in operation today as giving a clue to the attitude which certain sections of monopoly capitalism are likely to adopt towards the post-war Civil Service. It is more than likely that the more astute captains of industry will raise no objection to the retention of certain selected controls on conditions which they themselves will lay down. This is a move for which the way has already been prepared by the introduction of their own nominees into key positions within the controlling departments. Meanwhile the Civil Service is shouldering an enormous burden of responsibility, and when the history of its war-time function comes to be written we shall probably find that it has wrought even more prodigiously than it did during the last war. This it could not have done without some modification of its own structure and conventions. Conditions of service have been drastically revised. The seven-hour day for instance has gone the same way as the four or six weeks annual leave. Many civil servants have been working to a fifty-one-hour week for years and leave for everyone irrespective of grade has been levelled down to a uniform sixteen days. The effect on health is already becoming marked and Sir Henry Bashford, late Chief Medical Officer to the Post Office, recently remarked on the possibly harmful results of longer hours combined with unavoidable monotony.

In the Civil Service, as in industry, the discovery is slowly being made that efficiency of production and quantity of output do not necessarily follow from an overlong working week and the principle of more frequent rest periods is generally conceded.

The supervisory factor is a big problem in this connection.

In a multi-tiered organization like the British Civil Service there is always this business of big fleas and little fleas, and under the old dispensation the supervisory misfit with no psychological equipment could do a lot of harm, particularly in circumstances where the efficient administration and organization of processes was considered more important than the social results for which the processes were designed. As the civil servant has drawn closer to his public, however, and the need for speedy results has become more urgent, there has been a greater tendency as we have seen to delegate responsibility. Large-scale operations such as those performed in the Revenue and other departments are not doing away with the need for supervision but they are spreading it over a wider area and changing it in character. There is more real organization and fewer pinpricks. A lot more is left to individual initiative and "Passed to you, please" is no longer the slogan under which the Service, as a whole, operates. There are still a number of supervisory officers who cannot be prised away from the old regime, but with the staffs taking an increasing share of responsibility, through Whitley, for the smooth running of departments, they are fighting a losing battle. The Inland Revenue Staff Federation for instance is organized as a basis of office units and there is a wholesome and growing tendency for these local committees to be used as a clearing-house for staffing problems and the avoidance of friction in the organization of the work of the office.

Evacuation has had a further modifying influence on Civil Service conditions and practice.

The move whereby thousands of civil servants were taken from Whitehall and deposited in remote seaside resorts was made not in their interests but in those of the public service and for the greater safety of its records. Its effects on the staff have been devastating. The choice of the more popular resorts (the only one possible in the circumstances) has raised a billeting problem which so far as the billetee is concerned has only been solved by shutting a blind eye to deficiencies and turning a deaf ear to the plaint of landladies who resent an invasion which brings very little grist to their mill. A lot of the

earlier bitterness has been lived down but the Civil Service evacuee is still, to a large extent, unwanted. The government has hesitated to declare the Blackpools and the rest of them out of bounds to visitors for the duration, and as war workers are not taking its 'holidays at home' policy very seriously the position during 'the season' is not a satisfactory one either for visitors, landladies or evacuees. In one area the lack of transport facilities to enable civil servants to get to and from work at times which clashed with the visitors' similar attempts to get to and from the beach produced a sit-down strike on the part of the former and a hold-up of the tramway system for over an hour. Apart from living conditions, the official environment in these areas is unbelievably crude. Enough has been said earlier to illustrate the deplorably low standards of accommodation and equipment prevailing in most government offices even in normal times. But if the general public knew the conditions in which important official business is transacted in the once resplendent Grand Hotels, Metropoles and Hydros of our favourite resorts, they would marvel at the comparative efficiency attained. Much of the equipment would commend itself to the Heath Robinson school of improvisation, and comfort and convenience have no place in the life of the evacuated civil servant. Another problem which besets the Service to-day is the influx of tens of thousands of 'temporaries'. This is a phenomenon with which the last war made us familiar, but it is encountered now on a much larger scale. In the Postal and Telegraph Censorship Branch of the Ministry of Information for example, out of a total staff in the neighbourhood of 10,000, only a few hundreds are established. Most of the scientific personnel of the Service is employed in a temporary capacity and the problem of determining conditions for them has provided a headache both for establishment officers and the staff unions which look after their interests.

In every department expansion of function and the depletion of experienced staff as a result of call-up has led to the employment of every type of temporary labour from the boy or girl from school to the housewife straight from suburbia

with a husband usually in the forces. Much of this staff has had to be trained from scratch to the performance of duties which in peace-time no officer would have been required to tackle until a fairly lengthy probation had been served. The results have been unusually good, but could never have been achieved except by the sacrifice of the meticulousness and close observance of official instructions which slowed down the pace of every departmental operation before the war. The 'temporary' invasion has had another good result. It has humanized the Service and made it still more difficult for interested people to speak with awe and bated breath about its vocational character. Thousands of men and women are going back to their normal peace-time jobs with a knowledge of the inner workings of the state apparatus. They will have no illusions with regard to the oracular nature of its pronouncements but they will know something of its difficulties and problems and will be helpful allies in effecting its democratization. They will form in fact another bridge between the Civil Service and the people. Incidentally they will, of course, present a big problem for solution as part of the major task of post-war reconstruction. Some of the married women will want to get back to husbands and families. There will be others, however, who, having tasted economic independence, will want to retain it. They will make common cause with established women civil servants for the abolition of the marriage bar and there will be an early test of the government's already declared intention of finding work for all. If married women are excluded from the scope of that declaration many of them will want to know why. Questions on this and kindred matters were put by the hundred to the government's spokesmen at the Women's Conference convened by the War Cabinet not very long ago, but there is as yet we believe no hint of a reply.[1]

As for the male temporaries, many of them occupying

[1] As this book goes to print some of the replies have come to hand. On all women's questions, they make it clear that the government will offer no guarantee of the continued employment of married women in the Civil Service, and that its attitude towards equal pay remains unchanged.

professional and technical posts, their future is uncertain. It will be determined largely by the alternative possibilities of expansion or contraction in the immediate post-war period.

Some departments like the Ministry of Information will presumably close down soon after the cessation of hostilities. That in itself will throw some thousands of technicians on to the labour market. Others like Supply, Aircraft Production and of course, the War Departments, will probably survive the end of the war by a considerable period. A lot will depend on the arrangements for demobilization and the rate of changeover to peace-time production—Mr. Churchill is already talking of conscription as a permanent feature of our social life and the need to maintain a high degree of preparedness for, presumably, the next war. Yet other war-time departments, such as Food, will have an indefinitely extended lease of life. Given a continuation of rationing which most people are coming to accept as inevitable and part at least of the task of feeding a starving Europe, then the Ministry of Food is going to have its work cut out for years to come. The rest is conjecture. Expansion in certain circumstances—contraction in others. The politics of the later stages of the war itself will decide the size and character of the post-war Civil Service.

CHAPTER 16

THE CIVIL SERVICE AND CONTROLS

MONOPOLY capitalism we have said creates the precise form of state machinery necessary for its purpose. What happens, however, when that system issues in its most advanced form? When no longer able to maintain its class position by the methods of parliamentary democracy, it is forced to dispense with the normal constitutional procedures which serve it in its heyday and to use the methods with which fascist Italy and Nazi Germany have made us familiar. To put it shortly, how does the Civil Service fare under fascism? Let us take Italy before its defeat as our first example. To begin with we shall recall that the policy of state intervention in the economic life of any country is not a peculiar characteristic of a particular form of government. *Laissez-faire* has, in short, never been amongst the capitalist absolutes. We should expect to find therefore that long before the rise of Mussolini, Italy had been subjected to all sorts of controls. Acquaintance with the condition of the Italian proletariat and peasantry convinces us that those controls were exercised on behalf of Italian big business. The arrival of fascism was, as we know, heralded by the usual promises to every class, including the omnipresent 'little man', but in the result, as we also know, the position of the monopolists was in no degree worsened by the change of regime. The fascist Charter of Labour laid down the principle that state intervention, in the event of private initiative failing, should assume the form of encouragement, supervision or direct control but it also went on to suggest that private enterprise was the best way of furthering the interests of the nation.

The practical application of that principle carried out without parliamentary checks meant, in effect, that the state through its Civil Service could always be bribed to come to the assistance of bankrupt concerns or industries and by subsidy

and a measure of control over conditions of labour, restore its profit-making capacity. Here you have the deterioration of the Civil Service and a return to the jobbery and racketeering normally associated with the pre-capitalist phase of the development of the state apparatus. We find again that in 1926 the industrialists sought successfully to bring about a revaluation of the lira and to underpin it by reducing the cost of the Civil Service, a step which impoverished the lower and intermediate grades but left the administrative class untouched. The creation of the much boosted corporations provided another illustration of the close intimacy between the fascist state and private enterprise. In theory they were designed to curb the tendencies of some of the larger monopolies and to bring all the interests involved in commodity production under the aegis of the state. The big business answer to this was to demand and secure the assistance of the state in the creation of compulsory trusts. In theory the trusts were subject to supervision but this was never imposed and as we know the fascist corporations themselves were merely a façade under cover of which monopoly capitalism continued to flourish at the expense of the people.

Turning to Nazi Germany, we find a similar position. "Not only have the fundamentals of capitalist economy not been disturbed but none of its organizational forms have been seriously altered—all big combines, industry and trade continue to function as before."[1]

Industrial power in Germany we have long since discovered, and in spite of the lavish promises to the small man, is more highly centralized than ever. In this process the state has assisted by the complete elimination of the trade unions and other checks on capitalist exploitation.

German capitalism, as we know, has paid a price for this state patronage and protection, but it has returned a heavy dividend. Under the Nazi code the appointed "Leaders" of industry are themselves the nominees of the industrialists, something which should give us seriously to think when we come to consider that in this country at the present moment

[1] R. W. Brady, *Spirit and Structure of German Fascism.*

there are more than sixty former directors or employees of Imperial Chemicals Ltd. occupying important positions in our own Ministry of Supply. We know how in Germany, too, the control of labour is exercised through the German Labour Front, which supplies all capitalism's needs in the direction of docile and submissive manpower. The civil servant in Germany is forced to belong to the Nazi Party. Deprivation of civil liberty has there reached its logical conclusion. The Nazi Party leadership is itself hand in glove with the industrialists and under the Nazi system, therefore, the Civil Service is tied hand and foot to the capitalist system from which Hitler swore to deliver the German people.

Thus we see the differing degrees of identification between the state and monopoly capitalism in the rake's progress of the latter towards the fascism which produces its final contradictions. We see also the degradation which befalls a civil service which is forced to come to heel at the bidding of those who hold the reins of power. The big industrialists in this country would have us to believe that the retention of controls after the war and the maintenance of what they would describe as the stranglehold of the Civil Service would deprive us of *our* hard-won freedoms and sometimes they point to the fascist countries for confirmation. On analysis, however, we find that in those countries the operations of monopoly capitalism are in no way hindered by the shadowy controls exercised by the fascist state. *We know, therefore, that what really matters is the power behind the controls.* Under any system based on private enterprise, whether its form be parliamentary, democratic or totalitarian, the real rulers, i.e. the capitalists, can always say with much greater justification than Louis XIV, "l'état c'est moi".

President Roosevelt, himself an opponent of what he described as economic centralism, appointed a committee in 1938 to examine and report upon "a growing concentration of private power without equal in history", something which he regarded as "seriously impairing the economic effectiveness of private enterprise as a way of providing employment for labour and capital". The committee itself in the introduction

to its report, while condemning a system of unregulated monopoly capitalism, urged the people of the United States not to lose sight of the basic philosophy of American economy, defined as "a competitive system of private capitalism". When, however, it came to report it seems to have become convinced that the big corporations and monopolies had come to stay and that it would be impossible to do more than ensure that they operated in the general welfare. In coming to that conclusion it had discovered that "the principal instrument of the concentration of economic power has been the corporate charter with unlimited power—charters which afforded a detour around every principle of fiduciary responsibility; charters which permitted promoters and managers to use the property of others for their own enrichment and to the detriment of the real owners; charters which omitted every safeguard of individual and public welfare which commonsense and experience have alike taught are necessary". It is obvious that when the committee reached the stage of producing recommendations to prevent "the uneconomic concentration of economic power in private hands", it was conditioned by the limitations which its terms of reference had imposed upon it. It had been required to produce a formula which, while achieving the aforementioned objectives, nevertheless safeguarded the interests of competitive capitalism. It is hardly any wonder therefore that its practical proposals were limited in character and by no means unanimous. Such proposals, including *inter alia* the better protection of patent rights, limitation of patent monopolies, and the restriction of the exploitation of foreign patents at the expense of American industry, were directed not towards the protection of 'the people as a whole' but of that section of the industrialists which was finding itself squeezed out by the remorseless logic of events and the logical development of monopoly capitalism.

Nevertheless, the committee "thought it had formulated a philosophy which would serve the purpose of strengthening and preserving a free people safe in the operation of free economic institutions." Actually it had been given an impossible task to perform, one by comparison with which

that of King Canute was child's play. For in this case, and what is true of the United States is equally true of this country, there are two approaching tides, one from the monopolists to whom *laissez-faire* is a dead letter and the advance to socialism anathema; the other from the progressive forces which will interpret controls in terms only of social advance.

It is perfectly clear that if the monopoly-capitalist system is to enjoy complete domination in the post-war world it can only do so by assuming a fascist character, in which case the state form and the Civil Service must be adapted, forcibly if necessary, in order to conform with it. All of which is bound to make one apprehensive of the war-time entry into the Civil Service of the nominees of the monopolists, a move which can be seen clearly as an attempt in advance of the actual contingency to shape the Service to its own post-war needs. Here is what one might describe as the fifth column of monopoly capitalism working from within the state structure with a view later to handing it over to those who will adjust its control to the anti-social purposes which are already implicit in the public declarations of the anti-planners.

Something of this danger has been seen, but in the view of the writer, imperfectly understood by Herbert Morrison, who has delivered a number of speeches recently on the dangers of monopolist controls.

In one of them he drew attention to the "partnership between state and industry which under the spur of war re-energized the failing powers of many of our producers and enabled us to win our way back towards that industrial leadership which we were in such danger of losing". In the same speech he reminded his audience that "although a case could be made out for private and public enterprise existing together within appropriate fields, there could be no case whatever for private *unenterprise*, for private ownership and control without the spur either of a free market and free competition or of real social purpose". Where control is necessary it should in Morrison's view be directed towards "the ends of national wellbeing", and for that purpose "the state should be represented by officers specially trained to

understand and work with industry and to watch the interests of the consumer as a whole ". It seems clear from the foregoing that, like President Roosevelt, Morrison also is trying to back the horse both ways. That is the dilemma of all those who pin their faith to revolution by consent. They begin by postulating a system of control directed towards desirable social ends and finish up by perpetuating those which merely guarantee profits and protect shareholders at the expense of the people.

The danger of Morrison's approach (and it is a deadly dangerous one) is that it looks to a form of state bureaucracy rather than to the democratic decentralization of state power as the motive force behind the productive process. If he were not so blindly prejudiced he would know where to turn for the most brilliantly successful experiment in the diffusion of state power the world has ever seen.

It is, indeed, only possible to make the correct deductions with regard to the role of the Civil Service in relation to a developing economic system by surveying the broad field of its operation in the Soviet Union. Comparisons between the Soviet public service and our own are difficult to make and that fact is in itself significant for it arises because of the much wider area of activity over which the Soviet system operates and the mixed nature of the control which it exercises. There is for instance a high degree of municipalization not only of essential services as we understand them here but of such things as housing and public health. The co-operative organizations and trade unions are also sharers with the state itself in the general control of the means of production and distribution, and this makes it a little difficult to discover the precise outlines of what we should call the Soviet Civil Service.

We know, however, that the executive and administrative functions of the state are in the hands of the Council of People's Commissars. We know too that there are commissariats covering every branch of industry, transport, defence, justice, public health, foreign affairs and the rest, some branches on an all-union basis and others delegated to the commissar for each of the eleven autonomous republics

within the U.S.S.R. These might be said to approximate to our own state departments; but that said, further comparison becomes difficult. In this country for instance social insurance is administered through a number of agencies, but the central responsibility lies with several government departments with, as we have seen, considerably overlapping functions. In the Soviet Union, however, the function of the Civil Service, as we should understand it, in relation to social insurance has been largely handed over to the Central Council of Trade Unions, a body which, in addition, carries out a number of tasks in connection with factory inspection which again in this country would fall within the jurisdiction of the Home Office.

Again, although there is a Commissariat for Defence, its function so far as the organization of civil defence is concerned, is largely in the hands of a body described as the Society for Defence against Aerial and Chemical Warfare. There is in fact a considerable range of differentiation extending from a high degree of centralization to a wide dispersal of responsibility for the organization and administration of certain branches of social and economic activity. Under a system in which expanding production is secured by the elimination of the checks and hindrances of the profit motive, it is possible to introduce innovations and experiments in administration without in any way harming the social and economic fabric. A variety of agents can be brought in as allies and auxiliaries of the central government and in order to widen the sense of public responsibility. They have all to conform to the central plan but within that framework there is considerable scope for initiative on the part of trade unions, co-operatives, collective farms and the hundreds of scientific, cultural and educational organizations which assist in the general process of development. It is this fact which helps more than any other to stifle the bureaucratic tendency at birth.

In this country the gap between the public servant and the public is still wide, though the exigencies of the war and the increasing political and social consciousness of the rank-and-file Civil Service is lessening it. In the Soviet Union the gap is

narrower to the point of non-existence. Otherwise never for a moment could there have been such perfect co-ordination of the military and civil effort as we have seen in the resistance to fascist aggression which has so amazed the rest of the world. It is a matter for wonderment that with the evidence to the contrary piling up, the stale accusation should still be made that the Russian revolution had only succeeded in creating a new class of 'managers' with special privileges to which the rest of the workers were denied access. A book by James Burnham, called *The Managerial Revolution*, published only recently, repeats this unfounded assertion and seeks to represent the Soviet Union as a sort of Civil Servants' paradise. Actually the capitalist state furnishes far more evidence of bureaucracy. At every turn it is brought up sharp by the four walls of the private profit system which confine it. In attempting to interpret and apply legislation directed towards the maintenance of the economic *status quo* and the preservation of monopoly capitalism as the real power, what else can it do but try to find its way through a host of conflicting instructions and endeavour to apply them by reference to more or less rigid formulas? In the Soviet Union the state is at least on the way to becoming the representative of the whole of society. It is in process of taking possession of the means of production on behalf of "all the people". It has a constitution which provides for a planned economy designed "to increase the *public* wealth and to raise the material and cultural level of the toilers". Its Civil Service therefore need not stand "above and beyond the people". It has no separate interests and there is no capitalist class to insist upon its segregation. It is becoming less and less concerned with "the government of persons" and more and more concerned with "the administration of things".

CHAPTER 17

THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SERVICE

It will be impossible in this chapter to do more than refer briefly to the work of a selected few of the state departments and to give some idea of the way in which that work affects the general life of the community. The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries provides an excellent introduction.

Created as a department dealing only with agriculture in 1889 it added a fisheries branch in 1903 and became a ministry in 1919. Before this agriculture had been languishing for a long period and governmental responsibility had been too occasional to effect any marked improvement. When as a result of persistent pressure the Board of Agriculture was at last set up, one of the opponents to the bill spoke of the necessity of bringing back prosperity to agriculture, "not by Act of Parliament or the fostering care of a Department but by bringing home to the farmers and landowners that knowledge and power by which they themselves may work out their own deliverance". This gentleman was apparently one of the pioneers of anti-planning. Nevertheless, something had to be done to counteract the effects of the large-scale importation of wheat from abroad and the exodus of agricultural labour to the towns and the opposition was therefore overcome. The department started modestly by acting mainly as a registering and recording agency in connection with contagious diseases amongst animals, tithes and copyholds, ordnance survey, forestry, botanical gardens, and the muzzling of dogs. One of its earliest duties was to ensure the payment of tithes, an obligation which the occupiers of land were enjoined to accept "as a Christian duty".

More latterly the Ministry has been responsible for the redemption of the tithe rent charge and the keeping of records including title deeds, an examination of which would doubtless

throw a lot of light on the methods whereby most of the landed estates were originally acquired.

Its functions have been added to enormously within recent years and to-day it is responsible for a large measure of agricultural training and research, livestock improvement (today for instance it is sponsoring investigation into processes of artificial insemination), research into dairy farming and agricultural engineering, the development of small holdings and every branch of horticulture. It employs, apart from the grades common to the rest of the Civil Service, a number of veterinary surgeons, land agents, surveyors, architects, engineers, entomologists, ecologists, zoologists, barristers, botanists, gardeners and agricultural experts—all of them civil servants. It furnishes grants to colleges and institutes not themselves under government control for the furtherance of agricultural research, thus providing yet another example of the use of public funds for the furtherance of private enterprise within a sphere in which, until the beginning of the war, there had been more uneconomic individualism than in any other. Twenty years ago the Ministry authorized the creation of a credit association on co-operative lines for the purpose of making long-term loans to farmers; but this experiment failed because of this same individualism. Its function in connection with fisheries includes deep sea research, co-operation with the navy to provide protection for British fishermen, the cleansing of polluted rivers, and a number of others for which it employs a staff of trained and qualified naturalists and statisticians. It makes itself responsible for recording the size of catches and their value in the various markets, and it endeavours to chart the fluctuations in the movement of fish to assist the industry in determining the manpower necessary to secure maximum results. Now no one can deny that these are important functions from all of which the community should reap some solid benefit, but the position of agriculture and fishing before the war suggests that some at least of these benefits have not accrued. None of the painstaking work of departmental statisticians, for instance, could prevent the economics of scarcity from keeping the fish

in the sea from the plates of would-be consumers. We have spoken a good deal of the frustration of the civil servant whose disinterested efforts are so often given an anti-social twist by irresponsible interests and here quite clearly is a case in point. The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries has placed immense resources at the disposal of two of Britain's foremost and most vital industries. There is no indication that either of them has taken full advantage of these resources in order to produce a maximum yield from land and sea and no artificial restriction of supplies to the consumer. Hence this department, like so many others, loses much of what should be a valuable social crop because it sows in the barren soil of economic individualism. Contrast this with the statistical bureau of the Supreme Council of Public Economy which in the Soviet Union employs thousands of experts and assistants. Here statistics are produced not for their own sake nor to assist private enterprise to maintain its rate of profit, but to record essential data covering every social activity and need and to enable reliable estimates to be made of productive potential for any given area or period.

Pursuing a similar theme let us turn for a moment to a little-known branch of Inland Revenue. The Valuation Office was a creation of Lloyd George during his crusading period in 1909. The taxation of land values was a centre-piece in the general election of that year and the Valuation Office was given the task of giving administrative effect to the legislation which followed. In actual fact and although it was specifically included in the budget, the taxation of land values was never more than a piece of vote-catching window-dressing more or less of a piece with the promises which the Tories are making today to out-Beveridge Beveridge. But the Valuation Office had been created and a role must needs be assigned to it. As it happens, the war of 1914-18 brought about a considerable rise in land values and the work of this hitherto obscure branch began to assume considerable importance. It acted on behalf of other government departments in the purchase or sale of lands, assisted the Ministry of Health with housing schemes, was responsible for the valuation of school sites for the

Board of Education and the determination of income-tax assessments on certain classes of property. During the slump it carried out certain duties on behalf of the Ministry of Labour in connection with the development of special areas and arterial road schemes. Since the present war began there has been a further extension of its function. In 1939 it took over the whole of the work of assessment under the War Damage Compensation Act until 1942, when part of it was transferred to the War Damage Commission. This is the briefest possible outline of the function of the Valuation Office but it is enough to indicate its intimate connection with some of the most urgent problems associated with the private ownership of land and buildings. It will depend entirely on the fate of the Barlow and Uthwatt reports as parts of the ground plan for a better post-war Britain whether the resources of this branch of the Civil Service are placed at the service of the community as a whole or whether they will be cribbed, cabined and confined by the total lack of planning which disfigured both the town and the country after the last war.

The social significance of income tax will come right home to everyone. This, the largest branch of the Revenue Department, has a closer relationship with the economic system than any of the other departments of state. The frustration suffered by the scientist employed in the National Physical Laboratory is probably no greater than that of the socially conscious income-tax official who in peace-time might have fretted under the knowledge that of every £ of tax assessed or collected by his agency only a small proportion was devoted to social service, and a considerably higher proportion to interest on the National Debt and what he might have regarded as non-productive expenditure. Moreover, before the war he laboured under the additional disadvantage of working to a fiscal code and with machinery which in all essentials had suffered very little modification since it was introduced over a century before. The local income-tax official was tied to a system which forced him to find his way through an intricate maze of legislation and instructions. It required him, long before he got to the stage of determining a liability to tax, to

decide the far more difficult question of assessability. He had (and still has) to know what constituted income for taxation purposes, and having determined that, to go on to decide upon how much of that income the tax should be levied. We have already pointed out some of the difficulties involved in that seemingly simple process, but even so they are only a small part of the complexity of a taxation system which is bound to take into account the varied nature of income in a competitive society in which there are so many gradations between the very rich and the very poor. Let us not forget that the device of direct taxation represents nothing more than a clumsy attempt to superimpose upon a sharply differentiated and inequalitarian system of rewards a small measure of equity as between one class of taxpayer and another. Just as those who are financially able to invoke the law are in theory entitled to equal justice from it, so there must be a certain equality of treatment of every individual member of the taxpaying public. In both cases however it must leave undisturbed the relative position of the differently remunerated sections of the community—and there of course is the rub. No one having spent a few years on the official side of the counter in a local income-tax office can be left with a shred of illusion as to the insanity of our economic arrangements. To determine the measure of income from an owner-occupied property, or from foreign possessions in a dozen different categories and countries, or from the wartime profits of a business which may range from a local tobacconist to a big monopoly, requires a knowledge of the way in which the system works, which leaves one branch at least of the Civil Service in an excellent position from which to measure its defects. Even within the sphere of salaries and wages the complications are almost as many. The gross remuneration of a taxpayer may include sums ranging between £2 and £2,000 claimed to be expended by him in the pursuit of his calling, and the formula used to test such claims is itself full of pitfalls, even when the actual facts are capable of ascertainment. But all these are only the first hurdles.

The method by which the famous theory of "equality of

sacrifice" is applied is based upon a system of personal allowances related to the taxpayer's domestic circumstances and the income-tax official has often to make judgments to which official instructions offer very little guide, and to explain and defend which calls for a considerable knowledge of human beings and their reaction to fiscal imposition. Definitions are of more than usual importance where income-tax allowances are concerned. The terms "maintenance", "dependance", "child", "separation", "expenses", "ownership", "occupation", "profit", carry a meaning sometimes quite different from that which common usage has given them. Official definitions are such as to ensure that the granting of an allowance under a particular heading should in general do nothing to impair the social fabric nor must its withdrawal offend a single vested interest. The history of income-tax reliefs is in large measure the history of the slow recognition by the state of social changes which have long since become accepted and assimilated. Any income-tax office could for instance furnish reliable data on such large social questions as the current trend in marital relations, the approach of women towards economic independence, the attitude of employers towards social security, and a dozen other important issues.

The war has, of course, introduced considerable changes in taxation procedure. The addition of eight millions of taxpayers threatened at one time to strain the machinery to breaking point and even to-day there is probably no more hardly pressed department than the Revenue. The calculations of war-damage contribution and post-war credit are war-time additions to its work and "pay as you earn" is confronting it with its biggest problem since income tax in its present form was introduced in the early part of the nineteenth century. Before the advent of this new code, the civil servants employed in tax offices were beginning to break down the suspicion and hostility normally displayed towards them by the great body of taxpayers. By visitation at factories and the establishment of close contact with shop stewards and trade unions they were parting company with the tradition

of separatism which kept the public at bay. Now "pay as you earn" is completing this process. Many of the workers, who in the long run will benefit by this almost revolutionary innovation, will know that the Revenue workers themselves were the first to advocate it and have taken a large part in overcoming opposition to a scheme of taxation which breaks entirely new fiscal ground.

That there will be still further modifications of the code is certain. Complete simplification however can follow only in the wake of economic and social change. At present there are too many vested interests in the retention of taxation in its present form. The accountancy profession, the building societies, the insurance companies, have all an axe to grind and inside the department there are still a few anachronisms and nineteenth-century encrustations to get rid of before the taxation system of this country can be brought into line with twentieth-century needs.

It is doubtful if any part of the state apparatus has been brought so closely in touch with the war effort as the Ministry of Labour, nor one whose function ever since it was created in 1916 has been so reflective of the later stages of a monopoly capitalist system tinged as it has been with social reformism. The story begins in 1909 with the passing of the Labour Exchanges Act of that year. The exchanges were to provide a medium whereby employers needing labour could be put in touch with workers having labour to sell. Practically its only other function round about that time was to administer the National Insurance Act of 1911, and to pay out the benefits provided under that act to those for whom no work was available. It may be remembered in passing that the maximum rate of benefit did not exceed 7s. per week and that it was paid for a strictly limited period. By 1918 there were four million insured workers and the employment-exchange system became a permanent part of the state structure. The end of the war of 1914-18 brought the almost simultaneous release of hundreds of thousands of workers from the production factories and the armed forces for whom other work was not immediately available.

The existing Unemployment Fund would have been exhausted within a few weeks if it had been called upon to shoulder this new commitment, and a device known as "out of work donation" was introduced to save the situation. Its originator was the then Prime Minister, Lloyd George, and it was probably as good an insurance against that social upheaval which would otherwise have ensued as any other. Ex-service men received a non-contributory allowance for at least six months, while frantic attempts to resettle them in industry were made. Every possible expedient was tried out, from the King's Roll scheme which urged employers, including many war profiteers, to take their quota of disabled men (some of the ex-service organizations described this process as "selling crocks to crooks") to vast training schemes which very often failed in effect because by the time the training was completed the job was non-existent. Desperate attempts were made to solve the problem of reabsorption by the creation of public works. Arterial roads for instance were constructed and the writer has knowledge of one area in which at the first whisper that work was to commence the local exchange was stormed by hundreds of work-hungry ex-servicemen, some of them badly disabled. The staff handling these and other urgent problems were almost entirely composed of temporaries, themselves on wretched rates of pay. There was a time in fact when a cashier, himself a disabled ex-service man, and paying out weekly more than £3,000, was in receipt of less than £3 a week. And then followed the years of alternate boom and slump with the unemployment figures mounting to unheard-of heights and in the depressed areas comprising sometimes more than half of the population. Again the Unemployment Fund became unequal to the strain imposed upon it, and another form of public assistance for those who had exhausted benefit under the Insurance Acts was introduced.

These were the days of the means test and the wholesale transference of labour from the so-called "special areas" to new industries in other parts of the country—days in which the staff of the Ministry of Labour were making acquaintance at first hand with the tragic results, in terms of wasted human

effort and productive capacity, of an unplanned post-war economy. Today the same staff are facing a very different problem. With the war-time phenomenon of full employment its principal task is the disposal of the nation's man and woman power to achieve the maximum war effort. Every employment exchange therefore is also a National Service Office and the scope and function of the ministry has been enormously extended. It has been the registering agency for the armed and auxiliary forces. It has had to handle the countless difficulties involved in the Schedule of Reserved Occupations and it has had complete authority over the disposal and movement of labour under the Emergency Powers Act. It has directed millions of workers into the jobs waiting for them and has been given restrictive power under the Essential Works Order to prevent either employer or worker from parting company. It has taken over certain functions hitherto exercised by the Home Office in connection with factory inspection and welfare, and it is already preparing for the second time within a quarter of a century its plans for post-war resettlement.

This is an amazing history of the development of one state department and of the impact upon it of drastic social change, including two major wars and the uneasy peace which separated them. In its administration it has inevitably been conditioned by the economics of the situation from time to time. In boom time it acted as an exchange mart for human labour. When the slump came its chief function was to administer the Insurance Acts and to pay out money. In the last immediate post-war period it did both and endured continual frustration in its attempt to fit square pegs into round holes. In this war it is discharging responsibilities in relation to what should be, but still is not, a total war. The next phase of its development will be determined by the extent to which the full-employment circumstances, which up to the present only war has been able to produce, are carried over and continued in conditions of peace. If that happens it will be a great day for the employment-exchange staffs and some compensation for the grim and depressing tasks which under the existing dispensation

have fallen to their lot. Meanwhile, the lessons of the limitations imposed upon a government department by a system based on private enterprise are writ large in the history of the Ministry of Labour.

We cannot do better in closing this chapter than refer to the special position of the Assistance Board in relation to the ameliorative processes which in large measure or small arise out of and accompany a stage of monopoly capitalism in which it can still make reformist concessions to public opinion. This department takes up the story of state aid for the discards, temporary or otherwise, of the system where the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Health leave it.

It was not until 1930 that the Poor Law of bumbledom was renamed Public Assistance and the mantle of the Boards of Guardians descended upon the County and Borough Councils. We have already noted that because of the acute industrial depression of the between-war years the Unemployment Fund verged on bankruptcy and it became necessary in the interests of sound, orthodox finance to transfer that part of the unemployed community which had exhausted its benefit to another agency which would make provision for it on a basis of need. It was in 1934 that the Assistance Board was set up to administer this new service, and by 1935 it had become directly responsible for 800,000 unemployed persons and indirectly for almost another two millions of their dependents. From this time onward, the local authorities were responsible only for certain non-insurable and special categories. To cope with the rest, the new board opened 350 local offices and appointed 130 appeals tribunals. It embarked on research directed towards ascertaining the reason for long periods of unemployment (a little naïve this perhaps) and gave individual attention to the more chronic cases. It prescribed courses of training, particularly for young people, and provided certain welfare facilities. When the war came the board experienced the modifications and extensions of function that as we have seen created big problems of organization and administration for every department. Among its new tasks were included the assessment and payment of allowances to

civilians incapacitated by war injury, the payment of supplementary pensions and later the examination and settlement of claims for immediate relief, as a result of air-raid damages. For this latter purpose it organized a fleet of mobile offices to handle claims within a few hours of an actual raid.

There is probably no part of the state apparatus which has done more to impress upon its staff the need of a humane and understanding approach towards the public it serves. That is due in very large measure to the willingness of the administration to utilize the experience gained by the staff in what one might call laboratory conditions. This is not to suggest that there has been a complete absence of bureaucratic tendency. A department which has to depend very largely on the accurate completion of forms could hardly avoid that; but there is evidence to show that the staff have not been slow to acquire the knowledge with which all civil servants should be equipped—a knowledge of the feelings of the person confronting him on the other side of the counter. It can have had no more delicate or disagreeable task than the administration of the means test and the determination of the degree of dependence upon others by reference to which the payment of public assistance is normally calculated. At the same time it can have had none more likely to open the eyes of its own employees to the larger political implications of a system with the worst results of which they are daily and hourly confronted. The Assistance Board is in the nature of things an 'ambulance' section of the monopoly-capitalist state. With the experience it has gained, can it be doubted that it could in different circumstances make a big contribution towards the implementation of the government's scheme of social insurance and find a place within the framework of a comprehensive Ministry of Social Security in which it could assist greatly in the process of post-war reconstruction?

CHAPTER 18

THE POST OFFICE

It is a far cry from the year 1512 when, according to the available records, the first postmaster was appointed, and in none of the public services has there been such tremendous development. The original sole object of the postal service was to convey the king's mails and the conveyance of private or commercial correspondence was for some time only a side-line. Naturally, therefore, there was every temptation for the private trader to set up in competition with the state and there were, in fact, all the possibilities of a big privately run mail service until a stop was put to it in 1609 by the creation of what was virtually a state monopoly. For years after this, however, attempts were made to organize private services on a cut-price basis and we find that it was not until 1840 that the attempts were given up and the state could claim that it had ousted all competitors.

For some time it appears the services were poor and the postage rates high, until in 1635 the first reforms were introduced and steps were taken to make the postal service a self-supporting institution with fixed charges and regular deliveries. For some unaccountable reason, however, London was not included in these reforms and it was left to a private individual, by name William Dockwra, to challenge the state monopoly and to organize a service on the basis of a penny post. From all accounts this became so profitable that the state could hardly afford to overlook its existence and Dockwra was, therefore, put out of business and his service, together with the penny post, taken over as a going concern by the Postmaster General.

The revenue-raising possibilities of the postal service were given further recognition by an act of 1711 which imposed increased rates and then for a considerable period the service was farmed out to an enterprising person, one Ralph Allen,

who brought about such improvements that in addition to bringing increased revenue to the state, he managed to net a fortune of half a million for himself. It is not at first sight easy to see why the Post Office should from its earliest days have been singled out as the revenue milch cow, but it is certainly true that whenever the state coffers stood in need of replenishment the postal services were compelled to show an ever-increasing credit balance. This was the case during the Napoleonic wars when rates again soared to unprecedented heights and the affairs of the Post Office were put on such a stable footing that by the year 1840 it was possible to show a revenue of £2,390,000 and a profit of £1,633,000.

At this stage Rowland Hill arrives on the scene and with him the uniform penny post. According also to some authorities, the Post Office for the first time became primarily an instrument of communication and only incidentally a medium of taxation, which perhaps is only another way of saying that a rising industrialism was demanding improved postal facilities and getting them.

The subsequent landmarks in the development of the state-controlled communications service were the purchase of the telegraphs in 1870, of the trunk telephone system in 1896, and of the local system in 1912.

Prior to 1870 the telegraph business was in the hands of a number of competing companies with the inevitable result in terms of indifferent service and a differential tariff. It cost the state £10,000,000 to acquire the telegraphs and of this sum over £7,000,000 went to the companies by way of compensation. To illustrate the rising demand for cheap and efficient transmission we learn that when in 1883 the sixpenny telegram was introduced, it brought about a fifty-per-cent increase in the number of telegrams.

The history of the telephone system followed a similar course. Thomas Bell brought his epoch-making invention to London in 1877 but the government would have none of it and it was left to a number of private concerns to perfect and exploit it. In 1880, however, the government did succeed in obtaining a High Court ruling to the effect that a telephone

was a telegraph within the meaning of the act but it made no attempt to follow up this advantage and to take over the telephones as part of an ever-widening network of communications. It displayed here, as elsewhere, a notable reluctance to interfere unduly with the prerogatives of private enterprise and it was only when private enterprise itself clamoured for the more efficient service which only the state could provide that the trunk system was eventually taken over at a cost to the public of £459,000.

Fifteen years later, the taxpayers of the country paid out another £12,500,000 to enable the state to acquire the rest of the telephone system.

Another important service taken over from private enterprise was the savings-bank business. This, after a small beginning in Scotland had grown to such an extent that at the beginning of the nineteenth century more than 500 savings banks were opened during the course of a single year. All this business passed by law to the Post Office in 1861. The result was astounding. In 1870, for instance, the total deposits amounted to £6,000,000—by 1880 they had risen to £33,000,000, and in 1938 the amount deposited was little short of £500,000,000. The state, in short, had provided a further incentive for the thriftiness which had its roots in the insecurity and precariousness of private enterprise—a fact which the Tory party was not slow to recollect when many years later it defeated the Labour Party at a general election with the slogan "your savings are in danger".

It would be reasonable to assume that a profit-making department fulfilling a social function of constantly growing importance and with ramifications spreading in every direction would have permitted its own employees to share in the general good—the more so since a committee of enquiry in 1933 placed on record its opinion that "on the whole, the Post Office performs the services for which it is responsible with remarkable efficiency". But in one thing, at least, the state was determined to follow closely in the footsteps of the private concerns from which it had taken over. We shall not be surprised, therefore, to discover that in 1933 out of a total

of 180,000 full-time employees of all grades nearly one third received pay (including bonus) not exceeding 50s. a week, and one half not more than 60s.

We shall also appreciate that, notwithstanding an increase of the Post Office surplus from £4,450,000 in 1922 to £10,632,000 in 1932, a London postman with years of service to his credit, was fortunate in the possession of 112s. 2d. a week including bonus, and that over 13,000 auxiliary part-time postmen would be unreasonable to expect more than an average of 26s. a week.

Nor were the telephone and telegraph staff any more generously treated, for the highest basic rate for skilled electricians did not in 1932 exceed a maximum of 58s., and out of a total staff of 30,000, only 4,000 received wages inclusive of bonus in excess of 66s., while at least one third of the 30,000 were occupying non-pensionable posts.

We find, too, that as a result of schemes of rationalization leading to increased output by fewer staff at reduced cost, approximately 4,000 Post Office workers were discharged or reduced to lower rank over a period of five years.

It would be useful to bring this story of a poor return for an indispensable social service up to date by reference to the scale of wages payable to some of the grades employed in the postal service immediately prior to the outbreak of war. The man who sold your stamps or issued your wireless licence, for instance, was on a scale rising from 30s. a week at 16, to a maximum of 108s., reached after eighteen years' service. His female counterpart stopped at 83s. 6d. Telegraphists, a highly skilled community, went no higher than 105s. for men and 79s. for women. Sorters started at 36s. and finished at 102s. Women telephonists employed in central London soared dizzily to 66s. at thirty years of age and stayed there. Paperkeepers in the Savings Bank and Money Order Department enjoyed a 79s. maximum. Indoor messengers in London were worse off to the extent of 4s., while doorkeepers and liftmen were well on the poverty line with 55s. 6d. after three years' service.

Cleaners were paid at hourly rates which for part-time

cleaners started at 1s. 0¾d. and rose after three years' service to 1s. 2d. By comparison, the wireless telegraphists stand out as the aristocracy of the postal service. Commencing at 62s. 6d. and rising on passing the appropriate technical examinations to 76s. 0d., they finish up on a maximum of 120s. What of the man who actually delivers the goods? There are five grades of postmen according to area. The maximum of the lowest was 62s. 6d. and of the highest 75s. Auxiliaries of the highest grade were paid 1s. 4d. an hour after four years' service if they were men, 1s. 2¼d. an hour if they were women.

It will be seen from these figures that the state in the person of the Postmaster General knows how to drive a hard bargain. They furnish, too, some part of the explanation for a surplus amounting to £11,000,000 in 1937–8, just over £10,000,000 in 1938–9 and £7,500,000 in 1939–40. They strike one as a very inadequate reward for the delivery of 7,990,000,000 letters and 179,540,000 parcels, the handling and transmission of 58,382,000 telegrams and of 2,059,300,000 local telephone alls, the issue of 399,331,000 postal orders or the trans-ction of savings-bank business to the tune of £244,779,000. The figures quoted are for the year 1937–8, and represent only a part of the work of the Post Office for that year.

And how many people are employed in this vast organization? Here are some figures taken at random from the U.P.W. handbook—postmen (established) 61,945, postmen (part-time) 11,029, sorters 7,829, messengers 9,520, cleaners 4,018, porters 2,531, wireless operators 105, telegraphists 971 (men), 932 (women)—all part of an undertaking which by common consent works with such smooth efficiency that, apart from a few irresponsibles, no one has been found to suggest that it should be handed over to the tender mercies of private enterprise.

The further development of the Post Office is bound up, of course, with the general extension and development of systems of communication, including broadcasting and television, at present wholly, or in part, outside its jurisdiction. Its present ramifications are so widespread that they can be said to cover not one service but a dozen or more and each of them growing.

They touch and cross the boundaries of private enterprise at a number of points and the policy of the postal administration is made to conform very largely to the general pattern which private enterprise sets. It is even, as we have seen, itself a profit-making concern, so much so that a campaign before the war for the reintroduction of a penny post was brought to nothing, principally because it would have cost the Exchequer something like £7,000,000 in a full year. The significance of this victory for the Treasury will not be lost upon the reader. Here was a policy issue with a considerable bearing upon public convenience and commercial development which appears to have been decided by reference only to the revenue-producing capacity of the postal service.

It is this knowledge which has influenced the largest of the postal unions, the Union of Post Office Workers, to include in its programme "the joint management of the Post Office in conjunction with the State and the development of the Service on lines of increased public usefulness" or to quote from its printed objects: "The organization of Post Office workers into a comprehensive industrial union with a view to the service being ultimately conducted and managed as a guild." Now there is, as we have already made clear, no other Civil Service union which goes to these lengths in its attempt to claim for its members a share in the organization of the state apparatus. All the others have been content so far to exploit as fully as possible the facilities afforded by the various departmental Whitley Councils and some of them, as we have seen, with a fair measure of success. The postal unions, however, have a history which links them with the pioneers of industrial trade unionism and a membership which continues the analogy up to the present day. The U.P.W., therefore, has always been a convinced advocate of workers' control within its own industry. It has been unremitting in its propaganda for the creation of a Joint Administrative Council, seeing in this the logical development of the work of the Post Office Whitley Council and the best way of maximizing the contribution of the staff towards the better organization and continued development of the postal services.

A conference of staff-side constituents met recently to

examine the whole question afresh and a report was made to the T.U.C. with a request that the support of the Labour Party should be invoked. The reply of the T.U.C. is not without interest. It makes it clear that the General Council of the T.U.C. is not prepared to endorse the proposals for workers' control of the Post Office as they stand, and Sir Walter Citrine goes on to say:

> "The whole question of T.U.C. policy on Workers' Control is at present under review. Your Executive Council will, no doubt, be aware that the present policy of the T.U.C. is that workpeople should have the right to be represented through their trade unions on the boards of management of socialized undertakings and that this right should be secured by statute.
>
> "So far, however, no decisions have been made as to the legislative provisions or the administrative machinery by which this principle should or could be enforced, nor as to the extent of proportion of representation of workpeople on boards of management. These are obviously matters of the utmost importance requiring very careful consideration, and it did not seem to the General Council that your own proposals were sufficiently explicit or detailed on these particular matters. From informal conversations with the Labour Party, I understand that their considerations are proceeding in the same direction as ours."

Actually there is a considerable amount of controversy within the U.P.W. itself, and a fairly strong body of opinion by no means convinced that in existing conditions, workers' control is to be commended as the best policy for advancing the interests of the postal workers themselves or of the undertaking in which they are employed.

The view has been expressed by politically advanced sections of the U.P.W. membership that joint management with a capitalist state can itself provide no solution to the workers' problems and that staff representatives on any sort of joint council approved by the administration would find themselves in an impossible position. It is argued that to suggest that the

true nature of a capitalism which is reflected in every part of the state apparatus can be transformed by extending the objects of a trade union to embrace a measure of joint control is at best utopian, and at worst an attempt to contract out of the larger political questions of social ownership of the machinery of production as a whole.

Whatever the merits of this particular controversy, enough has been said to illustrate how urgent it is that the public should be well informed as to the inner workings of a department of state, the operations and development of which are found to be of such tremendous social significance.

CHAPTER 19

THE FUTURE OF THE CIVIL SERVICE

WE have now reached a point when it will be as well to draw the threads of our argument together and to see, if we can, the direction in which it leads us. We began with definition and found that no formula attempting to describe the Civil Service could be regarded as adequate which omitted also to define the state of which it was said to be the administrative machinery. We were principally concerned therefore to discover whether this state was one which, in the period covered by this survey, could be said to represent the interests of the whole of the people, or whether its operations were in substance confined to furthering and protecting the interests of a controlling minority. Can we arrive at a sound conclusion based on the facts presented in the foregoing chapters?

We have examined the general structure of the Civil Service and found that it mirrors most of the features which distinguish the social system within which it operates. In its class divisions and more or less watertight gradings, it maintains the class traditions of society as a whole. Its remuneration is, as we have seen, influenced by the long-term trend in industry and there has been an open and oft repeated disclaimer on the part of the Treasury of any responsibility to behave like a model employer. Where pension is concerned it has accepted no contractual obligation, and its general conditions of employment, particularly with regard to accommodation and equipment, confirm the view that monopoly capitalism is not prepared to pay more than it is obliged in order to obtain the service which it requires the state apparatus to render. We have observed that its administrative officials are for the most part drawn from one class, which explains a natural, almost a subconscious, bias towards the existing order and an instinctive aversion towards socially desirable innovation. Where this is not so (and there are a growing number of exceptions) it has

been found impossible to transcend the limitations imposed by "the system". We have seen too that the scientific and technical staffs have been almost as much at the disposal of capitalist production as if they had been directly employed in industry and that their divorcement from departmental administration has deprived them of the opportunity of influencing the direction of its policy. It has become clear that Service trade unionism is itself forced to adapt its technique to the conditions created by a multi-tiered and overdepartmentalized structure and that within the sphere of Whitleyism its progress has been slow and its successes partial. The attitude of the Treasury towards women in the Service has demonstrated clearly its intention to accept the still prevalent view of sex-differentiation as expressed by the large body of outside employers and its reluctance to take the lead in educating public opinion on such questions for instance as the continued employment of women on marriage.

Finally we have discovered, in a brief review of the development of selected government departments, the close relationship of their function with the changing needs of private enterprise and the frustration arising for the civil servant as a direct result of that relationship.

It would seem then that in our examination we have arrived at the view that Civil Service practice fits in with a theory of the state, which sees it as the representative of a class in whose hands the control over the instruments of production rests and not as the representative of the total community. Nor shall we consider this assumption to be invalidated by the obvious fact that a large part of the state apparatus is given over to the administration of a measure of social service, because we shall regard this as the minimum premium paid by capitalism as an insurance against social unrest.

Naturally therefore when we come to put forward our proposals for the post-war reconstruction of the Civil Service, it will be with this view of the state in our minds. We shall not be so utopian as to expect to alter radically the shape and function of the Service in advance of the alteration in the shape and function of the economic system. At the same time

we shall not suppose that there is nothing that we can do to influence the process of development both inside the Civil Service and in the larger movement of which it is a part. The major responsibility of progressively minded civil servants to-day is to work and plan for the sort of public service which, in structure and outlook, is capable of shouldering the new tasks which a planned economy will thrust upon it. The reasons which they can bring forward to explain the inability of the Service to solve problems inherent in a private profit system will help to convince the mass of the people that they and they alone can find the solution. Beveridge for instance declared in a recent speech dealing with his own report that "the unplanned capitalist system of society as we had it between the two wars did not give reasonable security from idleness, and without great changes it could not do so". "We must", he said, "recognize these facts and be prepared for great changes. It must become the formal responsibility of the state so to change the economic system that the men and women of Britain have value and dignity of service in peace as they have value and the dignity of service in war." These are fine words which call only for dissent in one important particular. On our view of the state we shall hardly expect it to be responsible for changing the system which it reflects. That task we shall rather feel to be one for "the men and women of Britain" themselves. But this view of Beveridge does at least contrast with those representatives of the capitalist class who see the end of the war as an opportunity to plunge once again into a struggle for markets and to throw off all the restraints upon the exploitation of public need which they have been compelled to suffer during the war itself. The writer of an article in the *Bulletin of the Oxford Institute of Statistics*, in analysing the upward trend of building costs, assumes that this trend will continue *when private building is resumed after the war*. There, you see, is a tacit assumption which unless it is challenged is going to frustrate every attempt on the part of Lord Woolton's assistants in the Ministry of Reconstruction to plan a better Britain. The Association of British Architects has said that "in a country like ours where private enterprise

and profit turns the wheels, causes have to be fought by private endeavour". But this, as it well knows, will be a wholly inadequate medium for the large-scale planning which reconstruction will demand. This will require on the one hand a persistent public demand against which the anti-planners will be powerless and a Civil Service fertile of ideas and eager at the will of the people to carry them into execution. It must be a Service, therefore, much more democratic in structure than it is at the moment. Its classes and gradings must be simplified and reduced in number. There is a strong feeling within the Service itself in favour of a one-grade structure into which every entrant no matter at what level of educational attainment should be recruited. It is a view which owes its strength to two factors, the first, a knowledge of the tenacity of the old-school-tie tradition within the administrative class of the Service, and the second, resentment at the gate-crashing proclivities of the big-business nominee. It represents therefore a sound democratic approach towards the problem of Civil Service structure, but it overlooks another important factor, and that is the educational system of the country. As this stands, and notwithstanding the introduction of a greater working- and middle-class leaven into the universities, the administrative recruit is largely a conditioned product of tradition and environment. But reconstruction, like peace, is indivisible, and the educational system is itself in course of replanning.

The Norwood report has declared in favour of "an education conducted in view of the special life that has to be lived and with the express purpose of forming persons fit to live in it", and it has made recommendations which would, if they were fully implemented, approximate more closely to that ideal. It is clear that if you can effectively democratize the educational system by providing facilities right up to the university to which every child can have access, you have gone most of the way towards democratizing the Civil Service. If your educational curriculum can at the same time provide for special courses in social and political science you have made still further strides in that direction and the net result would dispose

of many of the otherwise cogent arguments in support of a one-grade service. The next step must be to present a wide area of choice to every entrant into the Service with the opportunity of transfer from one department to another within reasonable limits, and completely adequate training, not only for the duties proper to the department of choice but for the purpose of acquiring a sound knowledge of the structure and organization of the Service as a whole and its significance in relation to a developing society.

Promotion within such a Service there will continue to be, but it will be something very different from the 'carrots' system which embitters far more than it inspires and produces an incentive not so much to give of one's best in reasonably well remunerated service as merely to get on at all costs.

One thing is clear, that in the promotion system of the future there must be equal discouragement both for mediocrity and the superficially equipped 'flyer'. Merit must be the sole criterion and there must be adequate opportunity for its development and discernment. Facilities for post-recruitment training should ensure the fullest opportunity for promotion by qualification to the administrative class and also to any of the scientific and technical classes attached to the various departments.

One of the big problems waiting to be solved by those who seek a Civil Service better fitted for its post-war function is to decide how the vast amount of routine work is to be done. It is inevitable that an increasing volume of mechanized and sub-clerical work will arise. At present it is performed by a mixture of grades, the bulk of it (within the clerical field at least) falling upon clerical assistants recruited wholly into a women's grade. This must at all costs be avoided in future. An improved educational system will produce types at every level which will not rest long content with duties that provide no psychological satisfaction.

Nevertheless the routine work must be done and the only solution lies in its performance during the early years of service by a mixed grade from which advancement to other

grades can be reasonably rapid. Meanwhile it would be essential to ensure the best possible working conditions including first-class accommodation and equipment for those employed on routine and mechanized operations and to furnish every facility for continued education. One thing is imperative. There must be no helot class in the new Civil Service and no blind-alley, all-women grades staffed on the assumption that a high proportion will automatically go out on marriage.

Another evil we shall need to tackle is the rigid departmentalism which has so unnecessarily complicated the problem of Service organization. The theory underlying the existence of special departmental classes is that the work of certain departments is of such a nature that those who perform it cannot be fitted into the general Service structure. The argument may have some validity in existing circumstances but certainly not in those of to-morrow when, as we hope, with simplified and well-defined gradings runnning throughout the whole of the Service, with the exception of specialized industries such as the Post Office, there should be no need for departmental side-shows. Common gradings and conditions of service including remuneration should be a feature of a reconstructed Civil Service, and the only exceptions to that rule should be in the case of the scientific and technical staffs which for obvious reasons must be dealt with on specialist though not necessarily on departmental lines. We have already stressed the need for the extension of a larger measure of administrative authority to technicians who in certain departments are qualified to take a share in the determination of policy. That is an obvious essential in a post-war world in which applied science is going to provide the master key. Another essential prerequisite in the creation of a healthier public service is the substitution for Treasury control of a Ministry of Personnel directly responsible to the central government for the work and conditions of the Civil Service and closely linked with the educational authorities of the country to ensure an even flow of recruitment at every level. The establishment officers of every department would come

under the general control of this ministry to ensure complete co-ordination on all matters of common interest. The good work now being performed under the aegis of Whitley would be continued and extended as a matter of course. The contribution which the staff has made to the greater efficiency of departmental organization would find recognition in the unqualified fulfilment of the Whitley constitution—in letter as well as in spirit.

The right of full participation by the staff in all matters affecting the efficient conduct of public business and a right relationship between Civil Service and public must be fully conceded and extended to the smallest office unit. There is abundant evidence that where that has been done it has had no adverse effect upon discipline. On the contrary, morale has gained by the increased sense of responsibility which a loyal adherence to Whitley principles has inculcated.

There are already big problems calling for almost immediate solution as we enter what we hope are the final phases of the long struggle with fascism. Once again, as we have pointed out, there will be the task of resettling in peace-time jobs the hundreds of thousands of men and women now serving in the forces. The Service must take its quota but at the same time it must safeguard against a repetition of the blunders of 1918, when it pitchforked ex-service men into jobs for which their abilities and aptitudes ill fitted them. Some test of fitness must be applied in the interests of the men and women themselves. This applies also to the thousands of temporaries, many of whom will feel that long service and the experience gained entitle them to prior consideration. That factor must be weighed against the argument that in a total war there can be no such thing as squatter's rights for anyone. There may, for all we know to the contrary, be a period of contraction of the state apparatus immediately following the end of the war.[1] Departments such as the Ministry of Information may close down almost at once. Others, like the Ministry of Food, will have a much longer lease of life. In the final analysis,

[1] Since this was written, a Treasury statement on post-war recruitment has been issued.

however, everything will inevitably depend upon the extent to which a people's war has led to a people's peace. That assumed, then we can go on to assume a rapid extension of socialization and public control.

We shall hope in fact to be measurably nearer to a socialist state in which the controls are operated on behalf of all the people.

In that event we shall see as the natural corollary of a full-employment policy arising from a planned economy, a rapid growth of the Civil Service in order to carry out the declared will of the people and to give organizational shape to its desires. Those who oppose that conception will endeavour through the hold which they have already obtained over the state apparatus to use the Civil Service to further the ends of a capitalism even more monopolistic than at present. They will demand protection and subsidy to enable them to build up a big export trade at the expense of the home market, and if that carries with it the implication of a measure of state control, they themselves will determine its nature and extent. Such a state of affairs, as we have said earlier, would be indistinguishable in its economic outlines from the fascism which it is the people's purpose to destroy and the Civil Service would be nothing more than its appendage.

With that grim reminder it becomes the business of all of us to welcome every move to democratize the British Civil Service, to free it from the prejudices which interested persons have deliberately fostered and to encourage it to come forward for the first time in history as the representative of the whole of the people.

APPENDIX I

STAFFS OF GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS

Date	1/4/39	1/1/40	1/1/41	1/1/42	1/1/43
Total whole-time non-industrial staff (excluding N. Ireland Reserved and Agency Services) ..	371,050	417,171	502,320	621,497	678,470
Staff employed by the main employing departments:					
Post Office	182,485	173,380	174,702	189,441	191,583
Ministry of Supply	—	15,949	30,549	54,121	67,328
War Office	19,733	28,091	38,720	54,865	65,047
Ministry of Labour and National Service ..	28,123	27,614	30,114	38,874	41,418
Air Ministry	19,657	26,886	23,474	35,382	39,133
Ministry of Food	—	13,455	28,058	34,433	36,589
Admiralty	12,923	17,638	23,934	32,030	41,839
Inland Revenue	24,224	23,537	23,248	31,250	35,437
Ministry of Aircraft Production	—	—	8,909	12,920	16,235
* Ministry of Information (including Postal and Telegraph Censorship)	—	531	10,288	13,101	15,362
* Press and Censorship Bureau	—	412	—	—	—
† Ministry of War Transport	—	—	—	13,131	15,110
† Ministry of Transport	2,956	3,182	3,002	—	—
† Ministry of Shipping	—	3,046	8,082	—	—
Corresponding numbers for the Administrative Group:					
All Departments	2,118	2,723	3,318	4,169	4,571
Post Office	61	52	48	48	44
Ministry of Supply	—	111	177	298	308
War Office	59	63	109	95	109
Ministry of Labour and National Service ..	59	75	113	144	142
Air Ministry	100	125	104	140	144
Ministry of Food	—	65	81	108	169
Admiralty	54	66	166	149	180
Inland Revenue	46	44	45	50	49
Ministry of Aircraft Production	—	—	77	100	105
* Ministry of Information (including Postal and Telegraph Censorship)	—	49	84	72	73
* Press and Censorship Bureau	—	8	—	—	—
† Ministry of War Transport	—	—	—	127	147
† Ministry of Transport	38	39	40	—	—
† Ministry of Shipping	—	35	58	—	—

NOTES.—*The Postal and Telegraph Censorship Department's staffs are included in the War Office figure for total staffs for 1st January, 1940, at which date they numbered 2,886. These staffs were later transferred to the Ministry of Information and the figures for this department for 1st January, 1941, 1942 and 1943 consist mainly of Postal and Telegraph Censorship Department staff. The Press and Censorship Bureau staff, shown separately for 1st January, 1940, were also transferred to the Ministry of Information and are merged in that Ministry's total in the returns for 1st January, 1941, 1942 and 1943.

† The returns from 1st January, 1942, onwards reflect the amalgamation of the Ministry of Transport and Ministry of Shipping (whose staffs are detailed separately in the preceding returns) in the joint Ministry of War Transport.

APPENDIX II

CIVIL SERVANTS WITH H.M. FORCES

The following figures show the number of Civil Servants serving with H.M. Forces or Civil Defence Forces at 1st October, 1943, *who are in receipt of or entitled to balance of civil pay:*

	Men	*Women*
Administrative	171	—
General Executive	740	8
Other Executive	1,545	7
General Clerical	6,605	1,266
Other Clerical	7,994	476
Clerical Assistants	—	2,071
Typing Grades	7	232
Inspectorate	293	1
Professional, Scientific and Technical	1,353	2
Ancillary Technical and Miscellaneous Supervisory Staffs ..	4,606	10
Minor and Manipulative	49,638	1,265
Messengers, Porters, etc.	1,774	1
Total Non-Industrial Civil Servants ..	74,726	5,339
Total Industrial Civil Servants ..	41,170	12
GRAND TOTAL	115,896	5,351

APPENDIX III

REPRESENTATIVE CAPACITY OF NATIONAL STAFF SIDE

The most recent available figures show that the representative capacity of the National Staff Side is now approximately 473,000, which compares with 437,000 at the end of 1941, 378,000 in 1940 and 327,000 in 1939. The figures supplied by constituent organizations are given below:

Post Office Group	
Union of Post Office Workers	156,076
Post Office Engineering Union	46,134
National Federation of Sub-Postmasters ..	15,167
Federation of Post Office Supervising Officers ..	10,832
Society of Post Office Engineering Inspectors ..	3,823
Society of Post Office Engineering Draughtsmen	1,084
	233,116
Civil Service Alliance	
Civil Service Clerical Association	128,095
Inland Revenue Staff Federation	26,514
Ministry of Labour Staff Association (approx.)	17,000
County Court Officers' Association	1,495
	173,104
Institution of Professional Civil Servants	23,489
Society of Civil Servants	18,145
Government Minor and Manipulative Grades Association (excluding industrials) (approx.) ..	9,400
Federation of Civil Service Professional and Technical Staffs	6,158
Customs and Excise Group of Departmental Organizations	4,935
Association of Officers of the Ministry of Labour	3,066
Association of H.M. Inspectors of Taxes	1,606

APPENDIX IV

CIVIL SERVICE STAFF ORGANIZATIONS

Organization	*Area of Membership*
Civil Service Clerical Association.	Clerical grades throughout the Service with the exception of certain departmental classes separately organized.
Inland Revenue Staff Federation.	Departmental clerical grades employed in the Inland Revenue.
Ministry of Labour Staff Association.	Departmental classes employed in the employment-exchange Service.
County Court Officers' Association.	Clerical staff and a few other special grades employed in County Court Offices.

(These four organizations are constituents of the Civil Service Alliance, a federal body created to handle matters of common interest and to appoint representatives to the Staff Side of the National Whitley Council).

Society of Civil Servants.	Executive and analogous classes throughout the Service.
Customs and Excise Federation.	All officers employed in the Customs and Excise.
Government Minor and Manipulative Grades Association.	Minor and manipulative grades other than those employed in the postal service. (This organization caters for a very wide area of miscellaneous state employment.)

APPENDIX IV

Organization	*Area of Membership*
Institution of Professional Civil Servants.	Professional, scientific and technical classes throughout the Service.
Association of Inspectors of Taxes.	Technical staff employed in the Taxes branch of the Revenue.
Association of Officers of the Ministry of Labour.	Higher grade officers not organized in the Ministry of Labour Staff Association with whom it is now linked in the Federation of Ministry of Labour Staff for joint action on matters of common interest.
Postal Group	
Union of Post Office Workers.	Minor and manipulative grades employed in the Post Office as distinct from the supervising, engineering and clerical classes. It includes postmen, sorters, telephonists, telegraphists, counter clerks, etc.
Post Office Engineering Union.	Minor non-clerical classes of Engineering and Stores Dept.
Federation of Post Office Supervising Officers.	To which are affiliated a number of constituent organizations catering for supervisory and superintending grades.
National Federation of Sub-Postmasters.	All Sub-Postmasters paid according to scale.

Organization	*Area of Membership*
Society of Post Office Engineering Draughtsmen.	As title.
Society of Post Office Engineering Inspectors.	As title.
Association of Head Postmasters.	As title.